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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Comparative Literature

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“MORE OR LESS” REFUGEE? : BENGAL PARTITION IN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Sarbani Banerjee

Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I problematize the dominance of East Bengali *bhadralok* immigrant's memory in the context of literary-cultural discourses on the Partition of Bengal (1947). By studying post-Partition Bengali literature and cinema produced by upper-caste upper/middle-class East Bengali immigrant artists, such as Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning* (*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* 1967, Bengali) and Ritwik Ghatak's film *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 1960, Bengali), I show how canonical artworks have propounded elitist truisms to the detriment of the non-*bhadra* refugees' representations. To challenge these works, I compare them with perspectives available in Other refugee writers' texts. These include Dalit first-generation literates' experiences, as described in Adhir Biswas' memoirs *Deshbhager Smriti* (*Memory of Partition* 2010, Bengali), Allar Jomite Paa (*Stepping on the Land of Allah* 2012, Bengali), and Manoranjan Byapari's autobiography *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* (*Memoir of Chandal Life* 2012, Bengali). As well, I examine the alternative *bhadramahila*'s ethos, as portrayed in Sunanda Sikdar's memoir *Doyamoyeer Katha* (*Doyamoyee's Tale* 2008, Bengali). This examination expands the knowledge of Bengali refugee identity in India beyond fixed *bhadralok* immigrant-produced stereotypes, in the interest of a more egalitarian and complex understanding.

To develop this thesis, I consult literary, historical, filmic and sociological documents on the Partition, feminist theories, theory of affect and theories of trauma and memory. I situate my readings of *bhadra* and non-*bhadra* refugees' artistic representations within major historical contexts – India's Partition (1947), the Indo-Pakistan War (1965), the Liberation War of Bangladesh (1971), and the Left Front's forming government in West Bengal (1977). Placed against these moments, the texts in hand record Bengali refugees' migration to India in different

phases, and their dissimilar post-Partition experiences. The Introduction outlines the origins of identity-markers *bhadralok*, *chhotolok*/Dalit and *bhadramahila*, observing the role *bhadralok* play in Bengal's Partition, the exploitation of Dalits in communal conflicts and the East Bengali *bhadralok*'s resettlement in West Bengal. Chapters 1 and 2 analyse memoirs on Bengal Partition written from non-*bhadra* perspectives. Chapters 3 and 4 study mainstream oeuvres and identify their allegiance to *bhadralok* ideology. My research, thus, revisits and compares the affective accounts of refugee *bhadralok* with alternative texts.

Keywords: Post-Partition Bengal, Bengali literature, Bengali cinema, Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray, Jyotirmoyee Devi, Adhir Biswas, Manoranjan Byapari, Sunanda Sikdar, kitsch, sentimentalization, memory, refugee, Dalit, *bhadralok*, *bhadramahila*, *chhotolok*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would, first of all, like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Nandi Bhatia, for her infinite support and for having faith in me, right from the time when this thesis was vague, and I was not sure of its future. I have dropped in to her office many times without any appointment, and even come up with queries when she was outside her office, but she never left any of my questions unanswered. In fact, her suggestions helped me think deeper on each of my ideas. Thanks to her extremely patient dealing with my slowly-becoming-confident brainchild, and her painstakingly correcting my drafts countless times, it has taken its desired shape today. I would say that my research questions lay dormant somewhere between the weak drafts I submitted, and the well-combed versions Prof. Bhatia enthusiastically returned to me every time. She is my model of unassuming merits – level-headedness, optimum confidence and foresight – all of which I tried to imbibe from her, in order to create the right temperament for my thesis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Julia Emberley, my second reader, for the excellent insight and feedback she shared about my work. Despite being on a very tight schedule, she read the chapters with a lot of interest. The theoretical framework she recommended for my chapter readings has created a wider and more meaningful context, where I can locate my research. Like Prof. Bhatia, I have approached Prof. Emberley with my academic doubts several times outside of her office duty, and she has promptly and happily resolved my questions for me. I am truly grateful to her for bearing with me when I was lacking the objectivity required for handling academic criticism, and for understanding my intellectual persuasions. Without her comments, this thesis would be inadequate in a wrongly overoptimistic way.

I am forever indebted to the Ontario government and the kindest donors who contributed to the Ontario Trillium Scholarship. You have financially made my graduate years at Western an immense success. It has always been my prerogative to live up to the standards of this highly competitive and prestigious scholarship, which supported my four years' study at Western. Being a winner and recipient of the Ontario Trillium Award has not only been exceptionally gratifying, but also served as a reminder about the quality of work expected of me.

I thank Prof. David Darby, our then Graduate Chair of Comparative Literature (when I entered the program in 2011), and Prof. Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu, our current Graduate Chair. If not for Prof. Darby, I would not have made the most vital contacts after coming to Western; if not for Prof. Mihăilescu, I would not know that not only surviving, but living a grad student's life is equally important. Prof. Darby equipped me to face the initial days of student-hood at Western; Prof. Mihăilescu prodded me to quickly grow up as a "senior" member of our departmental-family. I have greedily taken the most I could of both these two wonderful mentors. Prof. Darby has corrected so many of my conference abstracts, even when he was on sabbatical. Prof. Mihăilescu has lent me his easygoing spirit and his unique perspectives (and great books), both in his office and at the Grad Club, when my thesis was undergoing its worst fight and I, for hours on end, would argue about my stand to him. If one of them cushioned my struggle as an international student, the other opened up my intellectual boundaries. Both of them have throughout provided me with departmental amenities, such as travel grant or permit for study visits to India, more willingly than I could have ever asked for. Here I am not even attempting to describe how I have selfishly eaten up a lot of their time from their busy schedules, just so I could get a kick out of my occasionally super-saturated dissertation. Both of them have

inspired me to the fullest, and made my journey as a PhD scholar at Western rich and memorable.

I would like to thank Prof. Joyce Bruhn de Garavito, Chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, and the Course Coordinator of Hindi 1030 that I have been teaching since 2012, for her gracious support in every possible way. From helping me with reference letters for my students, providing me with highly constructive feedback about my teaching, to allaying my classroom duties in the final year, she has always ensured that I am able to focus on my degree-based responsibilities. If I have had ample time to cogitate on my work, it was because Prof. Garavito, who is also my employer, very kindly urged me to prioritize my research over my calling as an instructor.

I cannot proceed further without acknowledging the inestimable backings I received from Sylvia Kontra (Graduate Assistant), Dawn Gingerich (Administrative Assistant), Teresa Aconito (ex-Graduate Assistant) and Jamie Karp (Undergraduate Assistant). They have been superb, with all their energies, and ever-ready to help more. Be it in providing photocopies of my transcripts or determining the colour of my eyes for visa purposes, lending me a flash-drive when mine would not work to boosting up my confidence prior to the comprehensive exams, even dropping me off after the proctoring duties at 10 PM, they are the prized powerhouse of the MLL people. Absence of any one of them would mean paralyzing of a highly efficient body.

My special thanks to Carole Farber, Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Media Studies Program at Western, who has time and again provided me with information about film journals and articles, and even with additional valuable materials. I thank Peggy Ellis, the Research and Instructional Services Librarian at the DBW Weldon Library, who walked me through the amazing facilities of our library databases, and even scanned-emailed many texts to

me, when I was outside of Canada. I also thank the other service-desk librarians, each of whom is highly accomplished and disposed to assistance, but especially Mr. David R. Murphy, who has incessantly searched many of my reference items with me, and spent time on finding out tiny details that make my bibliography complete today.

I cannot thank you enough, Fabiana (Tepedino), for individually attending to the mess that I had made with my income tax filing, and for explaining where I went wrong. Without you, my federal sheets would have still been in a soup! Thanks to Susan Latta, our community lawyer at Western, whose guidelines and prompt advices immensely helped me in arraying my legal papers for residency. But for her, I would not have been able to read the meaning of many legal clauses, which I had to deal with for several months in 2014.

I would like to thank Dr. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury from Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (Kolkata). Meeting her in Summer 2013 was highly conducive in giving a mileage to my thesis proposal at its embryonic stage. I am grateful to Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, for letting me borrow some of the rarer books on the Partition of Bengal, although during my short stay in Kolkata, I could not officially become a member in the institute's library. Meeting Adhir Biswas in the Gangchil Publishing House in Summer 2013 was like a chance discovery of diamonds in a coal-mine. It was Biswas, publisher of Gangchil and an author himself, who had profoundly inspired me to work on the topic of Dalit refugees. My thesis would not grow its spine, if Biswas had not suggested to me some of the most seminal works pertinent to my research. I thank Dr. Arpita Bhattacharya, Associate Professor of Bengali in Lady Brabourne College (Kolkata), for introducing me to Lily Halder, interviewing whom has significantly facilitated my research project. It was very kind of Prof. Sekhar Bandopadhyay, to have promptly responded to my email and guided me about procuring his essay.

I thank my alma mater Jadavpur University, from where I received my Bachelor and Master's degrees, especially the entire faculty of Comparative Literature, for nurturing the love for literature in me. Whatever positive skills I have attained as a scholar today are largely attributable to all my teachers, who enhanced various avenues of interests in me, and encouraged my spirit of critical thinking and constructive argument. Suchorita *di*, Ipshita *di*, Subha *di*, Kavita *di*, Sayantan *da*, Sujit *da*, Samantak *da*, Aveek *da*, Dheeman *da*, Partha *da*, Swapan *babu*, Pratap *babu*, Kunal *babu*, Epsita *di*, Debashree *di*, Swagata *di*, Shoma *di*, Sucheta *di*, Mohua *di*, Rittika *di*, Mukulika *di*, I am, in parts, all of your making. My learning from those five years has been the learning for life. If I missed mentioning anyone of you, you know who you are; I remember *all* of you through your indispensable lecture notes and more.

I thank, among my friends, colleagues and associates, Katarzyna Jasinski and Uncle and Aunt Jasinski, for making me feel at home away from my native country and family. I am indebted to them for the warm ambiance they have heartily offered to me, and for frequently inviting me over to dine or lunch with them. Katarzyna is one of those few friends, who has shown admirable interest towards my research work, and I am thankful to her for the same. I fondly remember how Grace and Uncle Punnoose had made my first few stormy days in London manageable, in the most literal and metaphoric sense. I shall never forget the enthusiastic help offered by Kate (Lee Chilly), my first roommate and Nazia Akhtar, my senior colleague at Western, who lent a hand in setting up my first "home" in London with larger and smaller essentials. While Nazia made sure I knew the exact locations of my department and the libraries, Kate took care that I bought the right shoes and the right coat before the first winter arrived. Without these pleasant associates, the first winter could be rougher; luckily, it was not.

I am grateful to Jaime Brenes Reyes, for willingly offering to read parts of my chapters and for lending me his sincere comments. Thanks, Bruna, for keeping up my spirit, when I nervously produced an unsure draft of my Chapter 1 in the Comp. Lit. Graduate Forum. Swagata, thanks for getting in touch every now and then, and for asking how I am. I confess that our friendship has survived mainly because of your warmth, as I have, at times, been irresponsible, in not having texted/emailed/called you when I should have. Jaime (Ontiveros), Jen, Reza, Karim, Natalya, Philip, Sheena, Christian, Andrea, Nandita, Barbara, Parastoo, David, Ramanpreet, Paola – it has always been wonderful having you friends around. I learnt a lot from each one of you. Urvashi, I look back to the first year's course work and extra-curricular activities we did together; those were great moments. Thanks also, to my delightful groups of students – it was because of you I learnt how it works from the other side of the table. Apprenticeship was not a cakewalk, must I confess, but it was adventurous! It means a lot when many of you still write to me or/and come up with a heartwarming smile and “*Namaste Sarbani (ji)/teacher/Ma'am!*”

Thank you, dear city of London, with your nice people and nicer bus-operators, your serene localities and your collegial atmosphere. Your winter and fall, and spring too, your snows, storms, sudden gusty winds and an occasionally robust sun, are all closely and tightly interwoven into my chapters, presentations and lecture notes. Wherever I am located in Canada in the future, I will always be from London. This is because I got my first home outside my family in you.

I thank *all* my senior paternal and maternal relations – my *dadu, didu, kaku, kakima, mamu, maima, mashi, mesho, pishi, pishe, dada, didi*, and *all* my younger kin, for letting me know, in surprisingly candid and touching ways, that they are so proud of me. Thank you, Shastri *ji*, for all your blessings and your kind words of encouragement. Thanks Didi/Yoyo/Tutun

(depending on the mood), for making me believe I have the fire in me to complete a dissertation. You have lately got into the habit of overestimating me (which I do not mind at all!). Baba, I hope I could make you proud. At least I worked hard. God, it's alright, I see the sunny side of things and consider myself privileged. Lastly, Maa, thank you for lending me a slice of your unfinished dreams a long time ago. I have tried my best to give it a finishing, albeit a second-handed one. Maa, our endless useless yet harmless gossips helped me ponder deeper when alone, and think aloud when in your company. To you, the one I am born of, I present the one born of me. I know it came to you late, even as an apparition of the real one, but please adopt it. It is, with all its flaws, my first-born. Athena.

Now that you got your tongue, Athena, go talk to the world.

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INTRODUCTION: Partition of Bengal: A “Non-*Bhadra*” Point of View

Primary Observation, Questions and Field of Research

My dissertation complicates the subjective nature of *bhadralok* immigrant’s “memory” about the Partition of Bengal, as deployed in post-Partition Bengali literature and cinema. I examine major canonical texts, such as Jyotirmoyee Devi’s novel *The River Churning* (*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* 1967, Bengali) and Ritwik Ghatak’s film *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 1960, Bengali), which stereotypically represent the process of “*bhadra*” Bengali refugees’ immigration and resettlement from East Pakistan (later to become Bangladesh) to West Bengal during India’s Partition in 1947. I place them against works by non-*bhadralok* refugee subjects or works that have not received equal attention within Partition scholarship. By reading texts by Dalits, women and the *bhadralok* together, I examine the differentiated ways in which gender, caste and class mediate representations of post-Partition milieu and Bengali refugees. How can the *bhadralok*’s narratives on Partition be re-examined through non-*bhadralok*’s multiplicity of narratives and points of view? This is the question my thesis answers in the different chapters.

While the temporal bracket I consider for this study includes the post-Partition decades of 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the thesis goes against the chronological order of production. In other words, chapters 1 and 2 are based on readings of recently produced Partition literature, to see how Partition is remembered now, whereas chapters 3 and 4 are based on earlier works. This can be justified by the fact that the subjects I posit against the *bhadralok* immigrant artists have started to write much later. Because my research question is based on non-*bhadralok* post-Partition memories, I begin by distinguishing the recent unconventional literatures from the older canonical texts. Next, I broach discussions on how these canonical texts are biased and limited,

and why it is necessary to bring in alternate perspectives. The non-*bhadraloks*' works I choose for review are written in the form of autobiographical testimony and memoir, and the Dalit writings occasionally also resort to a confessional mode of narration. These genres aid my understanding of how the refugee Other's writings are shaped by post-traumatic impacts, political radicalism or indifference, and reflect the subjects' pain, shame and sense of guilt, as well as how they use memory to present a discursive view of the post-Partition period. Moreover, the thesis entails a switching from printed medium to the visual medium of films. The importance of films in the context of the Partition of Bengal is realized from the mass-scale influence they have had in Bengal and beyond. Films are vital in shaping diverse meanings of "refugee-ness" among the audience in post-Partition West Bengal. The canonical works I explore are from the genres of novel and film, both of which are privileged mediums for art.¹

Chapter 1 presents a reading of the first-generation literate Dalit male refugees' works. These include Adhir Biswas' memoirs *Deshbhager Smriti (Memory of Partition 2010, Bengali)*, *Allar Jomite Paa (Stepping on the Land of Allah 2012, Bengali)*, and Manoranjan Byapari's autobiographical work *Itibritte Chandal Jibon (Memoir of Chandal Life 2012, Bengali)*. Chapter 2 analyses the position of an upper-caste middle class-born unconventional female immigrant, as portrayed in Sunanda Sikdar's memoir *Doyamoyeer Katha (Doyamoyee's Tale 2008, Bengali)*. Because Biswas, Byapari and Sikdar are writing long after the historical split of the subcontinent in 1947, their narratorial focus has departed from the grisly depictions of war, massacres and communal hatred that had repetitively taken grip of earlier Partition narratives. These authors

¹ Since the pre-Partition period until recently, the *bhadralok* have been enjoying a monopolistic control in the field of Bengali cinema. Besides the Communal Award (1932) and the Government of India Act (1935), the Calcutta Municipality Amendment Act (1939) and the Secondary Education Bill (1940) took away the Congressman *bhadralok*'s supremacy in the Calcutta Corporation and in the Secondary Education Board (originally controlled by Calcutta University) respectively. Against this backdrop, Bengali cinema, although facing competition from the Marwaris, remained safe from Muslim competition. Its technological progress made it a strong medium for sustaining the sentiment of self-worth among the *bhadralok* (Gooptu 2413).

represent a point of departure from the *bhadra* refugees' romanticized descriptions of "Refugee Memory."

In Chapter 3, I critique Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning* (*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* 1967, Bengali), in order to show how the author foregrounds a feminist perspective through the character of a Partition-afflicted female victim, but ends up depicting her as a typical *bhadramahila* committed to patriarchal norms. *The River Churning* illustrates the figure of a silent, ostensibly raped upper-caste Hindu refugee woman, who does not speak her mind but her thoughts spoken for by the authoritarian female narrative voice. By virtue of her inertness and compliance with Hindu patriarchal yardsticks, the protagonist, in a regressive way, ultimately claims her eligibility in the privileged rank of *bhadra* society.

On the other hand, in Chapter 4, I study Ritwik Ghatak's film *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 1960, Bengali), in parallel reading with his other film *The Golden Thread* (*Subarnarekha* 1965, Bengali) and Satyajit Ray's film *The Big City* (*Mahanagar* 1963, Bengali), in order to explain why the former has attained much more popularity and occupied a significant space within "Bengal Partition Memory," compared to Ray's films. Ghatak's *The Cloud-Capped Star* is rife with elements that support biased memory-building around the *bhadralok* refugees. As I argue in Chapter 4, Ghatak puts forward a questionable homogenization of East Bengali refugee identity through a simplistic refugee/non-refugee demarcation, and spurs middle-class sentiments and values in terms of political goals.² Such conscious creation of what Adorno calls the "culture industry"³ overgeneralizes the episode of Partition to suit a specific politically

² I read Ghatak's attitude in terms of Soumitra De's concept of a different conjuration of nation-state – "nationalism can be used by different, social groups and classes for different and often conflicting purposes" (*Nationalism and Separatism in Bengal* 61) – which is based on a "territorial referent" of "home."

³ See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on Ghatak's cinema from the perspective of Adorno's "culture industry."

charged idiom. By channelizing the audience's collective memory to retain a selective and idealized past, Ghatak's filmic plot and characterizations condense the otherwise broad and complicated history of Partition into the educated, Leftist, Hindu *bhadralok*'s narrative.

As distinguished writer and filmmaker respectively, Jyotirmoyee Devi and Ghatak delineate the Partition of Bengal in their works by creating a particular representation of refugee experience, such as highlighting the middle-class refugee's fall of status, at the cost of eliding caste and class-based questions. By speaking mainly for a select upper-caste Hindu refugee group through an emotional content and emphasizing exclusively "*bhadra*" issues, these works fail to address the Dalit's position. Likewise, the gender issues they project tend to feed the *bhadralok*'s class-based patriarchal assumptions. For example, the kind of feminism that both of these refugee *bhadralok*-produced Partition narratives endorse does not in any way clash with the nationalistic image of country (*desh*) as the pitiable, powerless and despoiled Mother. They instrumentalize memory in bringing out a powerful sense of tragic-nostalgic affect, which supports the goal of legitimizing Bengali "*bhadra*" refugees' citizenship to West Bengal in the wake of the Partition. Furthermore, a bulk of scholarly literature has repeatedly upheld the "unquestionability" of these representations, thereby creating certain "truths" about them. My research looks at why and how the ideological fixities that propel these "truths" have been created. To answer the question, I locate these texts in the historical moments of their production, which have facilitated their achieving canonical status and forming dominant symbolic values, viz-a-viz the typified "Refugee Life." As mainstream oeuvres, they contribute towards prolonging a *bhadralok*-induced "politics of representation" within the field of Bengal Partition literature and cinema. Thus, the main purpose of this thesis is to revisit, challenge and investigate

reductive notions about the East Bengali Hindu refugee identity as represented in canonical works, by observing the alternate perspectives offered by Biswas, Byapari and Sikdar.

Arriving at Research Questions through Canonical Texts

In Urbashi Barat's words, Bengali literature on the refugee experience of Partition is marked by "commemorative mechanisms," which help the refugees to "(re)create their lost spaces, the heterotopias..." (Barat 219). Additionally, Dipesh Chakrabarty debunks the idea that in these works, the incongruous tie of a "sentiment of nostalgia" with the "sense of trauma" replicates a pattern already available in Bengali nationalistic writings. Barat identifies the East Bengali refugees as suffering from a paramnesic expression combining the Lacanian idea of *Verdrängung* or repression with *Verwerfung* or repudiation. This results in a repressed memory being brought to consciousness through a retrospective falsification and unconscious distortion of a narrative. By applying current emotional, cognitive and experiential states to it, the narrator fills up gaps in the memory with invented experiences that she/he personally believes in. I disagree with Moinak Biswas' assertion that the most popular narratives on Bengal Partition are only about the refugees' material growth in post-Partition metropolis. Contrarily, as I elaborate below, popular and, in fact, canonical texts on the Bengal Partition are the ones that emphasize overtly on "Refugee Struggle" and celebrate fixed imageries of East Bengal, such as the utopian ancestral (Hindu) village.⁴ They omit the facet of East Bengali *bhadralok* refugees' socio-

⁴ In Dipesh Chakrabarty's words: "The 'native village' is pictured as both sacred and beautiful, and it is this that makes communal violence an act of both violation and defilement, an act of sacrilege against everything that stood for sanctity and beauty in the Hindu-Bengali understanding of what home was" (Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages" 2145). The urban imaginings spotlighting the rural Bengal, in fact, started to come up 1880s onwards, as were largely observable in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Such rural retreat was seen as the heart of the Bengali landscape as opposed to the fake culture of Calcutta. The folklorist environment involved in this idea of "home" was not only a defence against the East Bengali "bumpkin's" otherwise stock image as the Calcutta theatre's stooge for speaking a "different" dialect, but also supplied staid ingredients of romantic nationalism. Tagore, in the capacity of a landlord, and Nirad C. Chaudhuri, as a salaried clerk have made many colonist impressions of the rural Bengal. Both being rooted in Calcutta and visiting the East

economico-political networking in West Bengal, which would otherwise identify elite refugee-ness in terms of power and resource.

Dakshinaranjan Basu's edited essay collection *The Abandoned Village* (1975, originally serialized in the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar* 1950 onward), and Amitava Ghosh's novel *Shadow Lines* (1988) represent victims of Partition as individuals, who are empowered by past memories. Moreover, in Nemai Ghosh's film *The Uprooted* (*Chhinnamul*, 1950), the refugee groups pervading the Sealdah Station are portrayed as "politically an extremely important demographic entity... [who] take part in a *reconstruction of the city*" (Biswas 52, emphasis mine). Moinak Biswas goes to the extent of calling these refugees the "protagonists in the city" (ibid.).⁵ In this attitude that "reconstructs" Calcutta spatially and culturally, the East Bengali *bhadralok* refugee's desire to dominate rather than coexist in the Calcuttan space becomes explicit. Their appeal to the government for material benefits, on the basis that they are disadvantaged, does not go with the agency functional in their "refugee gaze" towards the city.

Another example is Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) member Salil Sen's *The New Jews* (*Natun Ihudi*, 1953). The play lays a tragic emphasis on the Hindu *bhadralok* refugee,

Bengal countryside on duty or for outings, described the natural scenery through studied sensibilities of European art and poetry. This betrays the topical practice and the collective agreement among Westernized Bengali intelligentsia to consensually indulge in a picturization of the "beautiful Bengal." Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, in the early 20 C, gave an artless picture of rural Bengal in his work *Pallisamaj* (The Village Society), reflecting at the casteist exploitations and factionalism, which made the village as a reverse of the Bengali enlightenment and thereby an ideal entrant for the nationalistic development mission. At a later stage, Jibanananda Das' "Rupashi Bangla" ("Bengal the Beautiful") became the refrain of inspiration for the Bengali Muslims during the Liberation War for Bangladesh (1971).

⁵ This "refugee community," as portrayed by Ghosh, is unlike the peasant community described in Krishan Chander's story "The Giver of Grain" ("Annadata," n.d.), based on the 1943 Bengal Famine. I argue in Chapters 1 and 2 how the varied facets of refugee-ness resist merging with one another, which makes such a "community" seem as fictive as the category of the nation itself. Similar to the national community, the "refugee community" is artificially integrated around the aim of proliferating a political-material foundation, by narrating stories of martyrdom. Moinak Biswas notes that while Chander's story turns, for the first time, a rustic bumpkin's gaze into the gaze of a collective peasantry cast at the city, at the end of the temporary famine conditions, the peasants, unlike the refugees, return to their villages with dreams of new harvest (Biswas, "The City and the Real" 45).

and shows the 1947 Partition in light of the first Partition of Bengal (1905). In Jayanti Chattopadhyay's words, *The New Jews* "represents the contemporary political struggle of the Left as the continuation of the Swadeshi movement and in the process it sidetracks many issues, suppresses and bypasses many gaps and contradictions in the theme of the play" (Chattopadhyay 306). In glorifying selected historico-political phases of Bengal and rendering East Bengali *bhadralok* as the pioneer of political crusades such as the Swadeshi Movement and the Leftist revolution, canonical Bengal Partition texts like *The New Jews* shroud other facets of Bengali heritage. They obscure a huge section of Bengali people, such as the Dalit and Muslim East Bengalis, and the Dalit, Muslim and Hindu West Bengalis.⁶

On the other hand, *The Earth of Bengal (Banglar Mati, 1953)*, a play by Tulsi Lahiri, has a comparatively more layered storyline than *The New Jews*, as it does not discharge the East Bengali *bhadralok* from his due culpability. The educated professional class Hindu patriarch is shown to be obsessed with his caste and religious purity, such that he cannot imagine himself to be an equal to Muslims in the changed socio-political circumstances of East Pakistan. However, at the end of the play, educated Bengali Hindus and Muslims are brought together by the Language Agitation (*Bhasha Andolan*), which, to an extent, subsumes communal sectarianism. As the Dalit Muslim sits at the feet of the elite Hindu and Muslim brethren, the historically ratified class and caste stratifications become obvious even above religious difference. It is therefore not wrong to conclude that because *The Earth of Bengal* bears a critique about the Dalit's absence, as opposed to *The New Jews*, which makes simplistic opinions in defence of the

⁶ These canonical opuses on the Partition of Bengal can be understood through Adorno's reflection about the effacement of memory, which he reckons as an alert and conscious process. Rather than being exposed to weakness when confronted with the unconscious, the narrator of such carefully nominated remembrance functions through manipulating oneself along with the others – "...who must first talk himself out of what everyone knows, before he can then talk others out of it as well" (Adorno, "The Meaning of Working through the Past" 6).

bhadralok refugee's position, the latter is better preserved in mainstream Bengal Partition scholarship and memory.

Thus, in chapters 3 and 4, I analyse the *bhadralok* literary-cultural components that enable the survival of Jyotirmoyee Devi and Ghatak's works as canonical texts, and their respectively becoming synonymous with the literary and cinematic representations of the Partition of Bengal. In comparison to these standard works, in chapters 1 and 2, I show that the non-*bhadralok* writings lack such pregiven components. In other words, my thesis challenges the treatment of the Partition of Bengal by the (mostly East Bengali) elite artists, whose works have frequently negated and replaced every Other experience of refugee-ness by a singular description and reinforced narratives put forward by *bhadralok* refugees, thereby erasing class, caste and gender complexities.⁷ The stereotypes, formed by such commemorative texts, act as cultural vehicles of sentimental didacticism in the post-Partition popular consciousness. They enable building up a pseudo-intellectual⁸ Left-oriented caucus of Partition spokespersons, without paying heed to how several apolitical unconventional voices think about the event. The most prominent aesthetic damage rendered by such memory-building is the underestimation of alternative creativity. The *bhadralok* writings force-impress narrow and facile binary metaphors

⁷ This kind of stereotype formation is also observable in the representation of Jews in post-war European literature. According to Michael Bernstein, artistic assimilation results in the Jew's identity losing its individual possibilities and complexities. Stock interpretations such as delineated by the Austro-German writers render a homogeneous identity to the Jews. As a result, the Jewish character "whose traits are not instantly universalizable hardly figures at all," leading to a "symmetrical backshadowing" (Bernstein 24). While such narratives threaten to flatten the Jewish community, survival memoirs (similar to the alternative scholarship on the Partition) refer to a sheer variety, thereby resisting radical reduction into monological categories (27). On the other hand, viewed from a separate angle, a Dalit or an otherwise unconventional refugee's relationship to the generalist term "Refugee" can also be described as a Jew's paradoxical identification with "European-ness." As Jean-Francois Lyotard reflects, a Jew's exclusion and unnameability is itself constitutive of European identity, such that the Jew is at the same time Europe's quintessential Other and also its representative figure (*Writing Indians and Jews* 2).

⁸ In the after-years of Partition, a farcical situation is commonly observed in West Bengal, where being affiliated to the "Leftist" ideology enables one to assume an intellectual's status. Such an "intellectualism" does not necessarily entail knowledge of philosophy and politics as proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

on the collective thought processes of the reader/audience. As a result, in common understanding, glib associations are made between Ghatak's cinema and a supposed "radical-folklorish essence," which are further juxtaposed with Satyajit Ray's film's "renaissance-westernized consciousness." Similarly, Tagorean philosophy is marked by "feudal-aristocratic" meanings because it is not politically interested either in the Gandhian nationalistic or in the Communist "revolutionary" content of Partition as compared to Jibanananda Das' "avant garde-idealist" literature. Tagore, instead, looks at more expansive topics, such as Modernism in the Indian context and cultural-intellectual globalization. In avoiding the naturalized loopholes of Bengali Partition art, which liberally make use of biased ideology, my project, thus, seeks for points of view on Bengal Partition that are removed from the sentimentally charged sign called the "Refugee Experience."

Partition of India: A Brief Overview

India's independence in August, 1947 cannot be conceived in its full sense without mentioning the former subcontinent's concomitant partition into two separate nation-states – India and Pakistan. The epicentres of Indian Partition were Punjab and Bengal, even though a number of other provinces had witnessed considerable turmoil before, during and in the aftermath phase of Partition. Following the end of British colonialism, the geographical span of India was dismembered along communal lines, supposedly in order to facilitate a better administrative grasp and to stem the risk of continuous civil war, which, as many pro-Partition theorists point out,⁹ has been the inevitable fate of many other postcolonial nations. The Partition

⁹ For arguments in support and in opposition to this view, see Chaim Kaufmann's "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," Michael Horowitz and Alex Weisiger's "The Limits to Partition," Carter Johnson's "Partitioning to Peace Sovereignty, Demography, and Ethnic Civil Wars," Nicholas Sambanis' "Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature."

of India marked the greatest mass exodus in human history with an unfathomable number of people killed, raped, converted, mutilated and dispossessed in the course of displacement. In Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's words:

Each new eruption of hostility or expression of difference swiftly recalls that bitter and divisive erosion of social relations between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, and each episode of brutality is measured against what was experienced then. The rending of social and emotional fabric that took place in 1947 is still far from mended ("Speaking for Themselves" 3).

The Partition has engendered a vast gamut of scholarship, and its nuances have been recorded in private papers, government documents, agreements and treatises, several incompatible versions of political histories, social examinations and diverse genres of literature such as poetry, short story, novel, drama, testimonials, cinema and journalism. There are numerous literary works, chiefly in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and English – which portray the victimage and sufferings of Partition and its consequences in post-Partition times.¹⁰ Yet, as Suvir Kaul points out, owing to the preponderance of an over-used nationalist historiography, the Partition of India has been somewhat reduced to a simplistic official platitude of sectarian and separatist politics, and mostly coloured with patriotic exploits of prominent leaders, whose struggle had given birth to an "enemy-less" sovereign State. In this mainstream version, the fragmented and painful memories from the afterlife of Partition are disregarded, and there is

¹⁰ Some of the distinguished authors and their works are: in Urdu, Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories like "Cold Meat" ("Thandaa Gosht" 1950) and "Toba Tek Singh" (1955), Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story "Lajwanti" (1960), Qurratulain Hyder's novel *Travellers Unto the Night (Aakhir-e-Shab ke Humsafar* 1979); Amrita Pritam's Punjabi novel *The Skeleton (Pinjar* 1950); in Hindi, Bhishm Sahni's novel *Darkness (Tamas* 1974), Yashpal's novel *The False Truth (Jhutha Sach* 1958, 1960); in Bengali, Sunil Gangopadhyay's Bengali novels *Arjun* (1971) and *East-West (Purbo Paschim* 1989), Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning (Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* 1967), Atin Bandopadhyay's novel *Nilkantho Pakhir Khonje* (1971), Ramapada Chaudhury's short stories "The Stricken Daughter" ("Karun Kanya" n.d.) and "Embrace" ("Angapali" n.d.), Narendra Mitra's short story "Illegitimate" ("Jaiba" 1948); among the English novels, R.K.Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Raj Gill's *The Rape* (1974), H.S.Gill's *The Ashes and Petals* (1978), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* (1995), as well as many others.

marked privileging of a specific class, gender and community-oriented voice that submerges the possibility of other post-Partition voices – of women, children, religious minorities and Dalits – all of whom constitute the polymorphous texture of India. To narrate the “Partition tale” as dissociated from these multifarious categories results in a biased perspective “from above” that denies identification with the unofficial accounts.

Some of the prominent contributors to Partition Studies include Sekhar Bandopadhyay, Kamla Bhasin, Nandi Bhatia, Urvashi Butalia, Prafulla Chakrabarti, Joya Chatterji, Nilanjana Chatterjee, Partha Chatterjee, Jill Didur, Leonard Gordon, Mushirul Hasan, Ayesha Jalal, Ravinder Kaur, Ritu Menon, Gyanendra Pandey, Gurharpal Singh, Dwaipayan Sen and Ian Talbot – to name only a few. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey have broken new ground by rendering a subaltern angle to existent socio-political discourses on Partition. While Joya Chatterji has analysed the history of caste politics in Bengal that led to the province’s cracking up, Sekhar Bandopadhyay, Ravinder Kaur, Ranabir Samaddar, Gurharpal Singh, Dwaipayan Sen and Ian Talbot have contributed notable scholarship about the socio-historical and political aspects of stratified Punjabi and Bengali refugee identities in post-Partition India. Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin have produced momentous feminist interpretations of the Partition catastrophe, by incorporating interviews of West Punjabi women who survived or witnessed brutality, and by exploring the bureaucratic processes of rehabilitation and the complexities they provoked over the post-Partition years. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Subhosri Ghosh, Debjani Dutta and Syed Tanveer Nasreen have documented similar oral findings based on their fieldwork in Eastern India. Nandi Bhatia, Gyanendra Pandey, Mushirul Hasan and Jill Didur consider it a vital exercise to recover marginal voices through literary texts and preserve ambivalences in the power-driven central discourse of “Partition History.” While

Bhatia has focussed on the importance of unofficial memorialization in literature, thereby debunking the fallacy of nationalistic “History,” Didur has investigated how fiction, with its subjectivity and celebration of the “personal,” can come to assist historical research on Partition, by intercepting the authorized records. For these scholars, oral histories and reminiscences have an indispensable “compensatory” and “supplementary” value that enable a revisiting of the un-/underexplored dimensions of Partition.

Similar to Bhatia and Didur’s literary approaches that challenge “History” with “ordinary” voices, Chatterjee and Jalal’s unorthodox historical approaches problematize the nationalistic version of colonial and postcolonial past. They identify further layers in Indian society besides Hindu-Muslim divisiveness, which acts as a precursor to my central argument about heterogeneous refugee identities and experiences. They probe into the difficulties involved in the assumption of homogeneous religious subjectivity in the “Two-Nations Theory,” because such a straitjacket idea forcefully assimilates the undercurrents of class, caste, regional and linguistic multiplicities. Leonard A. Gordon also notes that while proponents of the “Two-Nation theory,” such as Jinnah or R.C. Majumdar, argued about latent conflicts and exploitations involved in Hindu-Muslim relationships since the pre-colonial era, these could not be the only pressures that led up to communal split-up and mobilization. Jalal points out that there was an unfeasible desire among the (mainly Hindu) nationalists to accommodate the diverse essence of Indian-ness within rigid political institutions, as had been previously created and implemented by the British colonizers. The result of such superficial imposition was a rift between regionalism and centralism at the geographical level, and an all-India nationalism and communalism at political level – disputes which had been present all throughout in different phases of

independence struggles.¹¹ Talbot and Singh also question the centralizing attitude that gave birth to the Indian nation-state. They look at the arbitrariness of the nature of Partition as well as post-Partition India's aim to gradually engulf and nationalize topographies, whose real features were shifting and fluid. That the borderlands remained a permanent cause of conflict in Bengal can be realized in the random decision taken by the Bengal Boundary Commission to partition the province and tag the Eastern half as "East Pakistan," whereas geographically it was not abutting the Western Punjab zone that became "West Pakistan."¹²

Partition in the Eastern Wing of India

Through an analysis of Adhir Biswas and Manoranjan Byapari's memoirs, I show in Chapter 1 that refugees in West Bengal were a diverse identity.¹³ Like many scholars, these Dalit

¹¹ Jalal identifies active colonial enterprise in institutionally fragmenting Indian politics through differential class, caste and communal manipulations. For instance, the Morley-Minto reforms (1909) had created a separate electorate for Muslims, and further, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms (1919) and the Government of India Act (1935) factored the specific Muslim identity by creation of "regional particularisms," because, in Jalal's words, "Even the most nominal form of representation at the local and provincial levels was a potential threat to the colonial state" (13). Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award (1932) was a great turning point for Bengal politics, as it dispensed seats in the new provincial assemblies between different communities according to their numbers, which meant a greater facility for the Muslims as majority in Punjab and Bengal (*The Spoils of Partition* 12). In addition, Gandhi protested B.R. Ambedkar's proposal for separate electorate for the "Untouchables," apprehending it would dismember the "Hindu" society by apportioning fewer seats to the Hindus in the new provincial legislative assembly. Afterwards, even though there was a negotiation between Ambedkar and Gandhi in 1932, which was known as the Poona Pact, it could not prevent the dissolution of the high-caste Hindus into a small minority, exposing them to the brunt of the Depression (Chatterji, "Bengal Politics and the Communal Award" 34-35).

¹² Ranabir Samaddar investigates how the grassroots level people think about issues such as border securities and look into alternative ideas of friendship and enmity "from below." He observes that the nation's glorious concept is either disregarded or not fully understood in the borderland villages, districts and sub-divisions. Borderland realities constitute habitual complaints from the security branches about local people's lack of cooperation in detecting "illegal" immigrants. In turn, the government of India hits back by not providing them with decent means of living, such as roads and schools. In areas like Hili, South Dinajpur district, there are greater chances of hostility among the national guards and the local inhabitants, than among people across two sides of the border. The government is continually a failure in checking trade or otherwise interactions with the Eastern frontier, and any brutal treatment on the migrants result in severe displeasure on "this" side (Samaddar, "Who is Afraid of the Migrants in Bengal?" 64).

¹³ Here, it is important to differentiate the terms "refugee" and "immigrant." While the refugees leave a country for the fear of religious or/and ethnic intolerance, due to threat to their human rights or because of war and

authors also record the Indian government's distinct treatment of refugees, who belong to different class and caste groups. As they came at different phases of migration, the government gave separate designation for each group, depending on their phase of arrival in India. Archit Basu Guha-Choudhury, Talbot and Singh note the periodic nature of displacement in Eastern India, where the influx of refugee migration kept happening long after the Partition. A major difference in handling Punjab and Bengal Partition was that while in the former case there was a mutual agreement of virtual exchange of population, in the latter, the Centre took measures to limit the transfer of population. According to Anasua Basu Raychaudhury, migration among East Bengalis from East Pakistan to West Bengal was primarily shaped by three basic imperatives – namely *dhan* (wealth/property), *maan* (honour/prestige) and *praan* (life).

Those entering West Bengal between October 1946 and March 1958 were classified as “old migrants” and were eligible for minimal government dole and assistance. This comprised the upper-caste and upper-class elite Hindu migrants, who were seen to hardly impose any economic burden on the government. They had no dearth of social and financial capital and were thus the most preferred (Talbot and Singh 115). To them, even as property was immovable it was exchangeable or saleable. Many from this level had assets or/and economically and socially influential relatives in the metropolises or smaller towns of what was carved out as “West Bengal.”

political conditions, immigrants are, strictly speaking, a group who move to a new country for better prospects or to unite with their family. In the context of the Partition of Bengal, there is a tendency of merging of these two terms. It can be asserted, at the risk of generalization, that the upper-caste prosperous East Bengalis, who moved to India in the pre-Partition decades and settled in West and North Bengal, Assam and Tripura, were immigrants. Contrarily, the Dalit and poorer East Bengalis, who moved decades after the Partition, were by and large religious or/and ethnic targets and hence refugees. However, the middle-class East Bengalis, as I discuss below, claimed to be political victims but the government treated them as economic migrants. Because of these nuances and discrepancies, which cannot be precisely verified, I have, throughout my thesis, used the two terms synonymously.

The second group consisted of migrants arriving between April 1958 and December 1963. The government euphemistically called them “in-between migrants.” This group was not recognized as “displaced persons” and was not given financial benefits, as the government treated it as a group of economic migrants motivated by the doles offered by the government. In fact, by 1958, the Central government was urging West Bengal to wind up its Rehabilitation Ministry.¹⁴ Members of the second group chiefly comprised the service-oriented middle class, who, even if not moneyed, had the benefits of proper social networking and education. Between 1947 and 1950, the governments of India and Pakistan allowed them to opt for citizenship and jobs in any country of their choice. Relying on the prospect of a permanent source of income on the other side of the border, these service-class immigrants brooked the initial unavoidable material loss for moving homes. Ranajit Roy claims that a great segment from among these middle- and upper-middle class people, who had earlier had a connection with Calcutta, did not register themselves officially as displaced persons, even though they greatly added to the population of post-Partition West Bengal, Tripura and Assam (Roy 53). According to Roy, owing to class and caste pride, they refrained from seeking governmental help.

Finally, the government identified “new migrants” as those who were Dalit refugees and who entered India between 1 January 1964 and 25 March 1971, mainly from the peasantry and artisan sections of East Pakistan. This stream of migrants continued to infiltrate into India until the late 1970s. The Dalit migrants were entitled to rehabilitation only if they sought to resettle outside of West Bengal (“Engendered Freedom” 66-67) because they were seen as an economic burden. For the earlier waves of “old migrants” and “in-between migrants,” the reasons behind

¹⁴ According to Samir Kumar Das: “As India was/is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the Governments’ use of the term ‘refugee’ was sometimes very casual and free from the legal niceties and obligations that are associated with it” (Das 107).

migration were mainly the fear of losing *dhan* (wealth/property) and *maan* (honour/prestige). Contrarily, for the “new migrants,” comprising people from the lowest castes of Bengal – the Namasudras, Sadgops and Poundras – the only presumable reason for migration was *praan* (life). They did not move until the post-Partition political economy of East Pakistan greatly changed in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, with the initiation of the Passport system in April 1952, the borders of the two adjacent nation-states tightened and took on deeper religious undertones, which spelt a change in attitude towards the existing minority. Even though all the while Scheduled Caste leaders like Jogendranath Mandal (First Law and Labour Minister, Pakistan Government) had reassured their people to stay on in East Pakistan as their interests were to be served there,¹⁵ the communal affairs greatly changed as Muslim land-owning classes came to occupy and dominate in place of the evacuee *bhadralok* Hindus. As well-off Muslim landowners mostly chose to employ Muslim farmers, the Dalit Hindu-Muslim peasant’s class unity was disrupted, and replaced by a newly growing sense of upmanship among the Muslim peasants towards their Hindu counterparts. Drawing their livelihood from land as cultivators,

¹⁵ In an article published in the *Anandabazar Patrika* (27 January 1948), East Pakistan Scheduled Caste leader Dhananjay Roy makes similar appeal, by deterring the Scheduled Caste people in East Bengal from selling their property and migrating to India, as there shall be no one to welcome them in that country. Intimating that such an act would be a sign of cowardice, he refers to Dr. Ambedkar, saying even he had not prescribed the East Bengali Scheduled Castes’ evacuation (*Udbastu Andolan* 19). In the subsequent issue of 28 January 1948, Mayor Girindranath Roychoudhury has been quoted saying that the mass departure of Hindu political leaders and influential people from East Pakistan is resulting in generation of fear and insecurity among lower classes who are already economically unstable (19-20). Gobinda Lal Banerjee, chief whip of Congress Party of East Bengal, implores the East Bengali *bhadra* Hindus not to quit their homeland and move to West Bengal out of fear (Haimanti Roy, “Partitioned Identities” 223-224). Alternately, the position of the middle class has been projected in a 7 March, 1948 article written by the Bengal Congress President to the Government of India. Here it is delineated how the earning sources of the city-dwelling middle-class Hindus in East Pakistan have been utterly foiled, such that to facilitate self-preservation, they are compelled to cross the border in swelling numbers (24-25). Lakshmikant Maitra in his Parliamentary speech (7 March, 1948) also mentions the economic hindrance that the Hindus have been facing in East Bengal in terms of total dispossession of industrial, handicraft-based and business resources (26). How the class concept becomes slippery and unsteady at this point of time can be realized from the fact that lots of families who had started from East Pakistan as economically sound, ended up being ransacked and plundered by hooligans and the so-called national guards at the border, following which they entered India as “*sarbahara*” or the necessitous rank people.

“new migrants” were people who had no secure alternative vocation in West Bengal, which implies that they had succumbed to an unsure, destitute life after Partition.

As Biswas and Byapari’s texts testify, in West Bengal, the refugee camps and colonies were stratified in terms of caste and class hierarchies. The *bhadra* poor refugees exuded an acute sense of dominance and distanced themselves from the Dalit refugees. In the subsequent turn of events, one sees this *bhadralok* group assimilating themselves into the struggling middle-class faction. Right from the beginning, most people from this financially weak yet “morally upright” position (a self-assigned label to mark them apart from the “lower castes”) had resisted settling down for camp-life, considering it a disgrace to live off general welfare/government subsidy. They, instead, strived for a more “civilized” identity in squatter colonies. As Talbot and Singh mention, “these groups were most sensitive to decline in status or in exercising a sense of cultural superiority over the community in which they were resettled” (106).¹⁶ In summary, the hegemonic social divisions between “*bhadralok*” and “*chhotolok*” in post-Partition West Bengal reflected a furtherance of status quo from the pre-Partition period.

Bhadralok and Chhotolok: A Retro-glance into history

Bhadralok, as I discuss in a subsequent section, emerges as a key figure in the context of Partition. Hence, it is important to look into the history of origin of this social marker, to understand its innate connection with power, hierarchy and exploitation. Parimal Ghosh defines the *bhadralok* of the colonial times as upper caste Hindu Bengalis possessing landed property and Western education as well as a code of moral conduct. *Bhadralok* is a variable social marker,

¹⁶ Such self-distinctive approach of the educated poor but “*bhadra*” immigrants with respect to the less “refined” sections is present in the character of ex-schoolmaster Taran babu, the male head of the middle-class refugee family shown in Ritwik Ghatak’s film *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. Even in his unwaged state and despite sheer need of money, he laments the “degradation of middle-class values and standards,” when his younger son accepts the job of an odd labour in a factory.

which shifted its onus historico-politically from aristocracy of wealth and rack-rentier agrarian structure to “cultural chauvinism that derived from a pride in Western education and inheritance of the ‘Renaissance’ tradition in Bengal” (Ghosh 4335). According to Barun De, India’s colonialism operated not only at the level of British bureaucrats, planters and professionals, but also included the white-collar brown *sahibs*, merchants and dominant peasantry – a class that had explicit fidelity to the cause of imperialism.¹⁷ In Sumit Sarkar’s view, even though the broad term *bhadralok* encompassed a wide range of preoccupations and statuses, ranging from “a Maharaja of Mymensingh to East India railway clerk,” it was unified through “a degree of shared values about self-perception” (quoted in Ghosh 247).¹⁸ For instance, admiration and aspiration for a given set of habits, such as penchant for Bengali literature produced by Tagore or Bankimchandra, vouched for the legitimacy of one’s *bhadralok*-ness. S.N. Mukherjee further notes that the *bhadralok* in the 19 C would enjoy a comfortable and stable public life under the status-quo of social order. His hegemony was not challenged by the Muslim middle-classes, the politically organized working classes or the socially alienated youths. Despite internal strife and persistent grounds of disagreement among different castes and *dal* (group), the *bhadralok* were culturally synchronized by unified social acts, such as involvement in educational activities,

¹⁷ Finding the caste and communal dissensions as inadequate reason, De emphasizes the class differences between the poor and the affluent – the “newly indigent” and the “nouveau riche” – which formed a combination of socio-economic circumstances, at the core of which was a struggle for power rather than any “ritual strife.” Additionally, reading the caste and the communal identity in a broader secular context, Arun Bandopadhyaya and Parimal Ghosh puts it: “Extra-communal factors, such as economic jealousy and reactions of lower classes to managerial interference in their internal disputes or solidarity for kin or fellow workers against state harshness are constitutive actors in class dissension” (13).

¹⁸ Tithi Bhattacharya also notes the contradictions inherent within this social marker, as it is the product of the same colonial forces that it challenges later through anti-colonial movements. According to her, while different economic classes converged within the broad term *bhadralok*, the upper segments tended to monopolize their cultural attributes as the chief markers defining this identity (Batabyal 3835). According to Bhattacharya, rather than the elite, the petty bourgeoisie and middle classes were the actual proponents of *bhadralok* politics in the context of nationalism. For more, see Batabyal’s “Who the ‘Bhadralok’ Was?”

school committees, political associations, protection of property or standing against particular acts of the government – all of which held them together by collective self-serving interests.¹⁹ Mukherjee observes: “...although the majority of the *bhadralok* came from the three high castes, Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas, membership was open to all castes” (Mukherjee 62). In fact, Radhakanta Deb’s first list of “Principle Hindoo Inhabitants” of Calcutta (1822) included at least seven families from the Subarnabanik, Tili and weaver castes. While some scholars believe that the Calcuttan *bhadralok*’s glory had undergone degradation in the post-Partition decades, others saw it as a democratization of the city’s elitist politics and culture.

Rajinder Kaur observes that by the early 20 C, the upper-caste’s monopoly over *bhadralok*-ness had weakened. While a new culturally conscious Muslim middle-class was gaining platform, the trading merchants, by dint of their industrial assets, were fast making entry into “*bhadralok*-dom,” in the process redefining the perceptions of middle-class-ness and the *bhadralok* world-space. Kaur notes that profiting from war and famine, the “*baniyas*” (merchants) who lacked *bhadralok* poise were co-existing and even occupying the centre-stage. Similarly, Ghosh observes that the socially mobile Dalits had made their claim to public and cultural capitals of the upper-classes, by occupying governmental and commercial offices. Independence (1947) had led to increased government spending and economic changes, as well

¹⁹ Evans-Pritchard’s sees this as “an equilibrium between opposed tendencies towards fission and fusion” (61). Even as the caste margins were liquefying as far as the identity marker of the *bhadralok* is concerned, the groups were still led by males who fulfilled certain criteria, such as immense wealth, headship, mobilizing power over a large number of economic dependents as well as stronghold over official positions. On the one hand, there are instances of the *dalapati* (group-leader) strictly maintaining caste sameness through observation of similar behavior, such as enforcing abstinence from alcohol and blacklisting those members who defied the rules. On the other, financial facilities determined one’s admittance within privileged coteries, reflecting how adoption of certain behaviour provided license of gentility to the former “lower-caste” Hindu males. Setts and Basaks of Calcutta are examples of adhering to traditional high-castes by endorsing caste *bhadraloks*’ patriarchal orthodoxy, as in case of protesting against widow-remarriages and divorces. Such acts distinguished them from the “inferior” *Tantis* (weavers). For more on caste-class dynamics around the *bhadralok*, see Mukherjee’s “Daladali in Calcutta in the Nineteenth Century.”

as expansion of the city leading to social changes – all of which modified the previous notions about Bengali white-collar gentleman. This was a momentous phase when individual achievements rather than bloodline defined identity. The new gentleman marked a counterpoint with respect to the colonial *avatar*, who mainly hailed from upper-caste Hindu literate stratas and served the colonizer’s administrative requirements.

On the other hand, *chhotolok* refers to those people who were directly associated with labour, who appeared in public without shoes to cover their feet, umbrellas to protect their head and oil to grease their hair and skin. At the level of social theory as expounded by the Brahminical caste-system, these were the people without rice to fill their hunger or education to enlighten them. The urban elites, in their urge to come across as loyal functionaries to the British rulers and dissociate themselves from indigenous folk culture heritage, had coined the belittling term *chhotolok* (literally meaning “small people” as opposed to *bhadralok* or “gentle folks”), and its synonyms *itarjan* (the “unrefined one”) and *gmeiya* (bumpkin) for uneducated poor people.²⁰ It had a vulgar connotation and was contrasted to what a “good Bengali” was. Jyotiba Phule first used the term “Dalit” in the 19th century, to bring to attention these subaltern peoples’ “crushed” status in a Hindu society. “Dalit” later came to denote all the historically discriminated groups in India, and following the policy of seat reservations in employment and education opportunities,

²⁰ Originally from the rural societies, these groups, upon migrating to the metropolitan space of Calcutta in search of jobs had turned into urban nomads, leading lives of domestics, casual labourers and street vendors. Mainly artisans and poor village people who settled in the city would dwell in squalors and keep the old folk songs and parish customs alive, in fact, forming a new genre by borrowing motifs from the contiguous urban environment (Anindita Ghosh 4333).

was interchangeable with the term “Scheduled Caste” (for more, see Guha, “Subaltern and Bhadrak Studies”).²¹

Controversies in the emerging print culture of colonial Bengal (since the late 18th century),²² which arose between the small presses in the Battala area of North Calcutta that produced sensational romances, erotic poems, songs, etc. and mainstream “*bhadra*” magazines, such as *Bangadarshan*, *Sadharani*, *Someprakash*, etc., attest to the fact that neither “*bhadralok*” nor “*chhotolok*” were standardized social markers. With counter-discourses continually arising from the margins, it was impossible for the centrally posited *bhadralok* to maintain his unassailable position. Anindita Ghosh remarks that amid increasing class and caste fluidity, the poor high-castes who had lost their former ritualistic superiority, the educated suburban population who migrated to the city for job prospects but could not fit into the urban culture, and Dalits, who sought socio-economic empowerment by competing with the *bhadralok* for clerical jobs, together formed the problematic in-between Other class.

Bhadramahila: Consort to Bhadrak, Pedagogue to Non-Bhadramahila

Knowing the historical background of the social marker *bhadramahila* is imperative for understanding my argument in chapters 2, 3 and 4. *Bhadramahila* traditionally refers to the female kin of the *bhadralok*, who symbolize the purity and harmony of middle-class ideals, especially by performing their gendered roles as mothers, wives and daughters within the precinct of home. Echoing the pre-colonial concepts of *kula* (generic collectivity) and *gotra* or *vamsa* (shared bodily substance among upper-caste Hindus), the modernized version of “*bhadra*”

²¹ Atrocities against Dalits remain a problem even to this day. Paula Banerjee notes: “In 1997, 504 dalits were murdered, 3462 were grievously hurt, 1002 dalit women were raped and 12149 faced other atrocities. This was in no way an exceptional year but rather a typical year in terms of atrocities towards dalits” (Banerjee 93).

²² The Serampore Mission Press was established in West Bengal in 1800 by the British Baptist missionaries like William Carey.

revolved around the ideology of domesticity, aiming to control women's reproductive power and limit their labour for running the household. In Himani Bannerji's words:

Through notions of morality, of virtue and vice as connected to the body and sexuality, and by conflating respectability and virtue with asexuality or non-sexuality, women themselves substantially inflected the sign of *bhadramahila*, the hegemonic moral/aesthetic/erotic configuration of the women of propertied classes in Bengal (174).

Ratnabali Chatterjee states that the *bhadramahila*-centric signifiers, such as a spatially separated *andarmahal* (women's quarters) and *purdah* (screen for women's privacy),²³ would traditionally earn a specific group of women higher social and moral status, compared to their poorer counterparts, who had to appear in public for manual labour. *Bhadralok*-generated codes of feminine conduct differentiated the *grihalaxmi* and *kulavadhu* (domesticated women) from *alaxmi* and *kulata* (noncompliant women).²⁴

On the other hand, Bannerji notes that historically, many among the *bhadramahilas* had the tendency to promote patriarchal ideas, and thereby adapt to as well as redefine the long-established gendered directives.²⁵ According to Bannerji:

²³ In a traditional Indian housing structure, *andarmahal* refers to the inner-house; *purdah* literally means "curtain," and refers to gendered and screened compartments within the house. The spatial arrangement in these households, with the courtyard separating the female habitat of *andarmahal* and the male dominated *kachhari*, is instrumental in defining the circle of mobility for the "well-bred" woman. The discourse of good, chaste Hindu woman as the embodiment of moral order, who empowered the spiritual entity of *Bharatvarsa* – originally the land of the Hindus, was constructed by the anti-reformist Hindu patriarchs. The peasants and artisans were at the fringes of this debate, whereas the Muslims were completely excluded. For more, see Ratnabali Chatterjee's "Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Bengal: Construction of Class and Gender."

²⁴ An anonymous author, in his book called *Stridiger Prati Upadesh (Instructions for Women)* sermonizes that the "good wife" or "pativrata" is "shy, silent, does her duty and is undemanding, stays away from men, keeps her body covered and does not wear flash clothes," whereas "the *beshya*" (prostitute) is "loudmouthed, always restless, bares special parts of her body, falls on men, demands jewellery and continuously wears revealing clothes" (Ratnabali Chatterjee 167).

²⁵ In the Bengali magazine *Antahpur* designed particularly to create a platform for exchange of the *bhadramahilas'* ideas, Jnanadanandini, an otherwise freethinking woman and the wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the first ICS, advocates wearing of blouse and popularizes stylish and bold Brahmika sarees. Yet, she also shares some reactionary views. She as well as Radharani Lahiri, women who were dedicated to the cause of "enlightening"

Women themselves, through their own subscription to the same discourse of “shame and civilization,” participate in the same conceptual enterprise. Their construct of femininity shares with men the premise of gentility or female goodness, but it is also self-divided and self-censoring (187).

Since the colonial era, class, social and ideological gradations among women were visible even in the agenda of various feminist organizations.²⁶ Nationalist feminism endorsed female education that emphasized women’s roles as exemplary mothers and wives through the literacy of home-science. Ironically, the Gandhian re-interpretation of Indian housewife, while critiquing the US notion of modernity, perpetuated the selfsame stereotypes of congenital non-violent femininity.²⁷ The impact of Partition riots on pan-Indian womanhood further disunited the sex

young girls with education, felt that housework was more important and that the process of “modernization” must not cause negligence to the “main” function of bearing and rearing children. Much like her Brahmo liberal sisters, Sonia Nishat Amin perceives that the Muslim *bhadramahila*’s position oscillated between overt Islamic fundamentalism and syncretic modern views. The Muslim *bhadramahila*’s negotiations and compromises within the pre-established status-quo is realized in the case of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein, an activist in the movements in Bengal and Bangladesh, who founded Sakhawat Memorial School (estd. 1912). Regardless of her singular dedication towards the Bengali language or her strong opinions against the *purdah* system, she could neither lessen the primacy of Urdu nor foil women’s segregation behind the *purdah*. While running an academic institution for women’s upliftment, her dependence remained tied to the Muslim *bhadralok*, who were mostly Urdu-speaking aristocrat Bengalis. Hossein’s middle-class self-contradictory image comes to view as she keeps the religious tone intact while criticizing the patriarchal aspects of religion, and, in fact, uses other-worldly arguments to bolster up the core purpose of women’s progress (Azim and Hasan, “Language, Literature, Education and Community”). However, one might also see implementation of a counter-ideology in Hossein exploiting rather than being exploited by religion. For more on the Bengali woman’s education, also see Karlekar’s “Kadambini and the Bhadrakalok.” For more on heterogeneity of the Indian Muslim woman’s identity, see Imtiaz Ahmed’s “On Feminist Methodology” and Gail Minault’s “Making Invisible Women Visible.”

²⁶ For instance, while the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) aimed to unify the elite Indian Hindu and Muslim women through social welfare networks, it could not rid itself of class, cultural and communal ghettos. AIWC members’ participation in independence struggle following Gandhi’s footsteps, such as represented by Ashoka Gupta and Renuka Ray, chose political particularism, in other words, affiliation with the Congress, over gendered universality (Dell 185). Diverse economic backgrounds and individual feminist positions, which demarcated the homemakers from the service women, further accentuated this clash.

²⁷ Careful creation of degrees of variance had been an earlier and indigenous process in Bengal, through implementation of directives for educating the *bhadra* society’s members. Shibaji Bandyopadhyay interprets Michael Madhusudan Dutta’s intention behind portraying the character of Babu Joychandra Bandyopadhyaya, the *zamindar* of Bijayanagar, in his literary work *Sushilar Upakhyan*: “‘Separation’ being his principle of operation, he sees to it that two different syllabi are framed for the two schools: it is social rank that determines how far and how much should the boys be taught. As a result, the more sophisticated courses are excluded as unnecessarily burdensome from the syllabus designed for the subalterns. Joychandra’s enterprise envisages a neat, in fact, a far too neat homology between social hierarchy and educational structure. After drawing up his agenda for the boys,

through socially-ascribed compartments, such as class, caste and community-based groupings, whose two extreme polarities could be reckoned as the upper-caste upper-class deified Hindu gentlewoman taking after the symbol of “Bharat Mata” (the feminized Hinduized imaginary of Motherland), and the demonized Dalit Muslim female, whose image concentrated around the symbol of the burqa.²⁸

It is not hard to imagine that the refugee-camps of the post-Partition decades were considered the hubs of “o-*bhadra*” (non-*bhadra*/*chhotolok*) people. Poor and Dalit refugee women, who had to rely for their upkeep on government relief and live under constrained economic circumstances, would appear in common bathing grounds near the tube-wells, go to *bazaars* and sleep in shared spaces with male relatives. In her study, Rachel Weber notices that the change in structure of houses of the refugees from ancestral homesteads in East Bengal to paltry colony hovels in West Bengal had led to “spatial considerations” and “economic restructuring,” and involved an apparent breakdown of some of the timeworn *bhadralok* norms and dissolution of gender spaces. During the 1950s decade in West Bengal, a huge influx of women had entered the labour force, many of whom had never worked before and never intended to. “Suitable jobs,” such as that of teachers, office workers, tutors, tailors and small shop managers, were popularized for women, which could be maintained alongside constant

he next turns his attention to the girls. And here too he exhibits the same graded sensibility: to avoid the unhealthy mingling of castes, he sets up, not one, but two schools for them. Having thus classified the children of Bijoynagar into four clear categories, Joychandra surely has the rare satisfaction of efficiently maintaining the rigidity of a closed and compartmentalised society” (Bandyopadhyay 28). In Bandyopadhyay’s reading, Sushila’s *bhadramohilahood* is a cumulative product of the European and the Indian moral components, and an outcome obtained after the purging of various negative socio-cultural filtrates: “And thanks to the careful tutelage of the two teachers, one European and the other Bengali, fortified as they are by the strong recommendations of the European women of Calcutta, Sushila turns out to be an exemplary student, a perfect ‘Nabina’” (28).

²⁸ While there is no denying that the emphasis on burqa is imposed chiefly among the aristocratic Muslims, in my understanding, the associated pejorative connotation magnifies with the Muslim female body’s further devolving down the economic, class and hence socio-cultural ladder.

domestic responsibilities. Creating ladies' sections in public buses and trams was the patriarchal state's gesture of support towards women.

In this context, Archit Basu Guha-Roychoudhury looks at the complex nuances of freedom and oppression, which define the figure of refugee *bhadramahila* in post-Partition West Bengal. Despite being recurrently treated as a symbol of female emancipation, the working *bhadramahila* refugee's self-liberation was secondary to her duty of supplementing financial depression at home. Even as a political drive among the Dalit refugee women was observable in their coming forward to join the CPI-initiated Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti (MARS, 1943), with respect to the *bhadramahila* immigrants, there was no such strong indication of radicalism. Coming out of the domestic confines meant struggling at a socio-cultural level with West Bengalis and at gendered and economic levels with men in general, which many middle-class-bred migrant women detested. Manikuntala Sen, one of the foremost CPI female activists during the Partition period, examines the hoax of female refugees' socio-economic advancement. She states: "Had it not been for the pressures of necessity and numbers, it might not have been possible to push open the doors that remained closed earlier" (Basu Guha-Roychoudhury 68). Namita Roychowdhury states that the immigrant *bhadramahila* had started working under pressure rather than with plans of economic progress (Basu Guha-Roychoudhury 67). Moreover, Weber notes that the working forum ultimately absorbed assumptions of domesticity, rather than emerging as an alternate public domain. Thus, one suspects a relapsing tendency among the better-off refugee women to their pre-Partition pattern of life. Basu Guha-Roychoudhury points out that while the post-Partition times enabled them to enjoy some economic freedom, on the flip side, the literacy rate among displaced Bengali women in general was less than 50%. Statistics show that the nature of employment for refugee women in most cases was in the blue-collar

workforce (68). Among the poorer sections, while an immigrant male's daily dole from the government was Rs.20, for a female it was Rs.12, implying that the gendered inferiority of a refugee female was sanctioned at the state level.²⁹

“*Bhadra*” Actors Mobilizing the Partition of Bengal

This section delineates the role that the *bhadralok* played in effecting the Partition of Bengal. It helps to establish a historical prequel to the Dalit-*bhadralok* discourse that I discuss in a subsequent section. The entire historico-political framework explaining how the Partition of Bengal came about through the *bhadralok* section's manoeuvrings and by side-lining the Dalits (*chhotolok*), helps to put forward the oppositional relationship of Dalit Partition scholarship, as observed in Biswas and Byapari's writings, with *bhadra* refugees' canonical productions.

Bengal, which was stratified on class and caste grounds till the first half of the 20th century, additionally took on a prominent communal turn in the trail of pre-Partition politics. However, the Partition of Bengal (1947), when read solely on communal lines, does not address the complex nature of the Bengali population. Elitist politics infringed the caste-class differences with religious meanings, to represent “Hindus” and “Muslims” as two homogeneous communal entities. Partha Chatterjee notes that the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat Movement (1920) was the first organized political movement by the Muslim peasantry of Bengal, which materialized with the initiative of the *ulemas* or religious preachers. While on the one hand, the turnout for the proletarian Muslim candidates in places like Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur were extremely high, on the other, this entire movement was given a religious rather than a class significance, as *ulemas* and *maulanas* called it an operation obligatory for all “believers” (Chatterjee, “Bengal

²⁹ Gender discrimination on the part of the government is explicit in case of Binodini Halder, originally from Barisal and 65 to 70 years old at the time of interview, who is a single woman with a daughter. She was not considered fit for rehabilitation until a long time (Subhashri Ghosh and Debjani Dutta 203-205).

Politics” 256-257). Alternately, Chittaranjan Das, along with his provincial Congress organization and with support from westernized elite Muslim leaders of Calcutta, had extended a Hindu-Muslim pact, and by drawing Muslims as Swarajist candidates (election 1923) attained immense success in the district boards of Jessore, Dinajpur and Mymensingh. In this case, the Hinduist nature of Congress was masked with “secularity,” where apparently religious, caste and class issues took a temporary backseat to facilitate political pragmatism. In the decades preceding Partition, the upper-classes from among the Hindus and Muslims were hoarding power and political grounds, while neither addressing the everyday exploitation of the underdogs who they assimilated into their political groupings, nor devising ideas for a more symmetrical agrarian economy. In fact, social conditioning by elite communalist leaders took on a vertical trajectory, infusing the grassroots populace with religious intolerance. Chatterjee points out that religion formed the code of political ethics and the determining factor in most of the collective acts of peasant insurgency.

The Bengali leaders from pre-Partition times had devised several non-communal choices for defining postcolonial Bengal. For example, through the 1937 elections, A.K.Fazlul Huq, leader of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and defector of the Muslim League, had as his primary agenda the agrarian reform of Bengal regardless of religious identities, even though a major section of his adherents were Muslim peasants (Dhar, “Partition: The Less Historical” 240). However, although KPP under Huq initially looked into the peasant class pathos irrespective of religious issues, its coalition with the Muslim League (1937) wore off its former tenant partisanship, eventually giving shape to a ministry that was “subservient to British Imperialism

and Bengal Landlordism” (Chatterjee 269).³⁰ Afterwards, the original character of KPP was completely lost as Huq, in order to save his ministry, coalesced with the Hindu Mahasabha, a fundamentalist Hindutva-based political party.

In the pre-Partition phase, Bengal became the bone of contention. Besides religious factors, power struggle at play among different political groups to rule over the territory of Bengal directly invoked class-centric and obliquely invoked caste-related concerns. Separate electorate for Hindus and Muslims following foundation of the Muslim League had resulted in a “communal cleavage” without so much as paying heed to the different layers constituting each community. M.L. Jinnah claimed the whole of the Bengal province to Pakistan owing to its Muslim majority population. On the other hand, as a counter-effect to the idea of the Muslim League’s Two Nation Theory, as well as in response to the rise in Gandhian politics, which marginalized the province and the people of Bengal from their previous pan-Indian stronghold,³¹ the patrons of Bengal nationalist cause demanded a separate Bengal Union. Bengal Union fortified the idea of a collective Bengali *jati* (race), focussing on linguistic and cultural unity of Bengalis over and above their religion-based disparity. The main proponents of an independent

³⁰ Muslim League’s roots of organized politics strengthened in the course of entering the rural society and the *jotedar*’s (substantial peasants’) responding towards it. It is ironical, says Jalal, that the All-India Muslim League (estd. 1906), a necessarily elite political bloc, asserted the protection of Muslim rights, whereas in reality, the Muslims (just like Hindus, Sikhs and others) defined themselves by their locality or province, and their everyday issues dealt with by the immediate heterogeneous milieu. Similarly, Chatterjee doubts whether this urban facet of a detached Islamic nationhood actually echoed the expression of Muslim peasantry masses, whose chief desire was not so much the demand for Pakistan as liberation from *zamindari* (landlord) oppression. Jinnah’s inclination for Pakistan was, thus, in view of the macrocosmic administrative situation – that of not surrendering before the composite nationalism and sovereignty of a Hinduized Congress.

³¹ Subhas Bose, the then President-elect of the Indian National Congress had withdrawn following his disagreement with Gandhi, which had further sidelined Bengal in the Indian politics (Dhar, “Partition: The Less Historical Other Story” 250-251). The Gandhians and the all-India Congress had forced the high-caste Bengali Hindus to give up political ground to “lower” or “Scheduled” castes. The last limb of Hindu privilege in Bengal was lost following the 1937 and subsequent elections, as the largely expanded electorate put into office ministries in Bengal dominated by Muslims. For more, see Joya Chatterji’s “Bengal Politics and the Communal Award.”

United Bengal were Sarat Bose and Kiron Shankar Ray among the Hindu organizers, and Abul Hashim, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, as well as Huq and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the Premieres of Bengal, from among the Muslim leaders. They encouraged a departure from communalist politics and instead stressed on a Bengali/non-Bengali differentiation.

United Bengal was especially a prerogative for the Bengali Muslims, who, as Gordon shows, were looked down upon by the North Indian aristocrat Muslims and exploited by the Hindu *bhadralok*. They were torn between their linguistic belonging as Bengalis and religious belonging as Muslims, as is understood in the hybrid nature of their language (called *dobhasa*), which melded Urdu or Persian with Bengali.³² So while the Nazimuddin-Akram Khan theory, backed by leading Islamic newspapers like *Azad*, *Morning News* and *Star of India*, was rooted to the central “authentic” Muslim League and its demand for a single state of Pakistan as the future habitat for all Indian Muslims, the Hashim-Suhrawardy group fought for an integrated Bengal in segregation from the Pakistan of the north-western frontier. This is because by including Bengal within its domination, the central Muslim League wanted to commercially exploit Bengal’s topography as well as reinforce the Ashraf-Atraf hierarchy within the Muslim community. Materialization of “Pakistan” would set up political, cultural and economic supremacy of the Urdu-speaking and more affluent Muslims over the peasant and proletarian Bengali Muslim counterparts.

³² Even as the Fazlul Huq regime set a trend of political awareness and high cultural practices among the Bengali Muslim middle-class with writers like Nazrul Islam, it failed to draw accolade from the Urdu Muslim counterparts or the Hindus, apart from some Left-oriented literati. Gordon, thus, looks at the formation of Bangladesh as a response to the need of an autonomous space that could contain the unique Bengali Muslim populace. For more on the different cultures of East and West Pakistan, how the latter politically dominated and economically exploited the former, and the impact of Bengali refugees on the Indian nation-state, also see Philip Oldenburg’s “A Place Insufficiently Imagined” and P.N. Luthra’s “Problem of Refugees from East Bengal.”

In this respect, the Hashim-Suhrawardy schools' proposal for the Union of Bengal aimed at a twofold advantage – rule by the quantitatively major Bengali Muslims over the entire province of Bengal, and not having to kowtow before the North Indian Muslim counterparts. On the other hand, while Hindu enthusiasts like Kiron Shankar Ray and Sarat Bose supported the idea of a United Bengal because of their true feelings for a language-based Bengali nationhood, they were possibly also apprehending the passing of the East Bengal's jute-based and other agricultural and industrial economy from the hands of the Bengali business community, most of whom were *bhadralok* Hindus, to the West Pakistani Muslim bourgeoisie.³³

The Indian nationalist leaders welcomed Partition, coalescing with the Hindu Mahasabha's idea of total exchange of population. In opposition to the Union of Bengal, Marwari businessmen such as Birlas sponsored the Mahasabha and looked forward to a Hindu-majority separate geographico-political space. Likewise, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, an elite Bengali newspaper and a staunch adherent of united India, voiced the nationalists' demand for West Bengal.³⁴ For most Hindu Bengalis, chiefly the *bhadralok*, staying in a United Bengal would

³³ As typical among the East Bengali opulent section who redefined their Self through a dualistic identity, Annada Shankar Ray, a once front line intellectual of the 1950s and 1960s who had vociferously criticized Bengal's division, afterwards withdrew his enthusiasm about the reunion of the two Bengals, feeling that the cultural affinity cannot overcome political differences. Once called the granary of Bengal and thus sought after as a coveted province, East Bengal afterwards turned into a country of distending population, an overwhelming section of which were Muslims. In Dhar's words, "The perceptions of identity are largely informed by the estimation of what discourses advance the self-interest of the people and what enables them to approach power...within the historically constituted range of choices" (Dhar, "An Elegy for the Broken Self" 71).

³⁴ Mid-November 1949 onward, Calcutta presses took pro-Indian government stance, claiming extrinsic circulation. For example, newspapers like *Hindustan Standard* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* made stories about images of deities being broken in East Bengal (published in November 22), which the East Bengal government denied, published a list of Hindu houses requisitioned and debated on East Bengal's Zamindari Abolition Bill (Lambert 315-316). In the post-Partition period, however, *Anandabazar Patrika* (ABP) takes on a *bhadralok* elitist position, and despite the Communist government's rule in West Bengal since 1977, it cannot rid itself of its hierarchy, distance and intellectual snobbery. The ABP editor-in-chief Aveek Sarkar aims to cater to a cultivated citizenry, mostly the Bengali civil servants, and takes pride at being copied by other local newspapers. A combination of high advertisement rates and circulation leadership discourages ABP from pushing its sales to the countryside and small towns of West Bengal, where 85% of the Bengalis live (Jeffrey 142).

mean political and social subservience to the Bengali Muslims, who were largely stereotyped as Dalit Hindu converts.³⁵ So a separate West Bengal was essentially a *babu*-class vision to prevent capsizing of power and hegemony, in terms not only of religion and class but also, of caste.³⁶

The Paradoxical *Bhadralok* Immigrant Subject

To understand the paradoxical subjectivity of the immigrant *bhadralok* class, it is essential to remember that the Bengali Hindus, chiefly from the Eastern zones, had been culturally and politically dominating India since the colonial period. Following a difference in opinion regarding the formation of the Bengal Union, it was not unlikely for many East Bengali *babus*, who worked in Calcutta and simultaneously enjoyed the harvests of East Bengal parish lands, to support the Partition of Bengal. Unlike what elitist Partition narratives suggest, such a decision would in no way wreak irretrievable material damage to the *bhadralok* East Bengalis. In

³⁵ In W.H.J Christie's words: "So long as the Bengal Hindus have Partition *and* Calcutta, they have all they want. Reunion with East Bengal would only put them again in a position of numerical inferiority to the Muslims" (Note by Mr. Christie: Mountbatten Papers 483).

³⁶ On the other hand, Subrata Shankar Dhar ascribes several reasons for the Bengali Muslims' ultimately agreeing to align with the Muslim League. Factors such as the British rulers' deployment of the Muslim League as the representative institution for the Muslim community, thereby making the latter realize that their interest lay in supporting the party; the Congress' failure to put issues in non-communal terms and in fact, as Mushirul Hasan points out, the Congress leaders' exploiting the sectarian and religious issues for short-term political gains; and finally, the efforts on the part of Hindu Mahasabha leaders such as S.P.Mookerjee coupled with Lala Lajpat Rai, Dr. Moonje and Madan Mohan, who overturned Nehru and Gandhi's struggle to reconcile with the Muslims (Dhar 244), contributed towards a cynical attitude among the Muslim masses that in turn strengthened the bulk and muscle of the Muslim League. Yet, as information from the India Office Records, London, suggests, the Bengali Muslims' congregation for political-religious cause as raised by the Muslim League barely coincided with the thick population that gathered around individualistic religious causes. It was only following the Lahore Resolution (1940) proposed by the Muslim League that a communal discourse in Bengal gained currency. Following the warfare in 1946-47, especially after the Direct Action Day in Calcutta on 16 August 1946 and retaliatory pogroms of mass killing of Hindus at Noakhali, the Muslim League became the mouthpiece political body for the Muslim community in all Muslim-majority provinces, portending the division of Bengal on communal lines.

contrast, Partition could rid them of the increasing Muslim dominance and help them to rejuvenate their lost political control in the Hindu-majority land of West Bengal.³⁷

Regarding the Partition in 1947, Pablo Bose notes:

Many Indian Bengalis continue to blame separatist sentiments amongst the Muslim leadership for the Partition of Bengal, yet as Joya Chatterji and others have argued, Hindu communalists were vociferous in their demands for an autonomous, Hindu-dominated region of Bengal (63).

Chatterji further observes that many East Bengali Hindus, until a long time, were part of the aforementioned communalist groups, who actively wanted the Partition to materialize, which would geo-politically unite them with their co-religionists in West Bengal. They anticipated that Partition would not directly affect their own geographical location, as their specific regions would be included in the Hindu cartography of partitioned Bengal, allowing them to stay put in their ancestral homes. Subsequently, they had voted in the Bengal Assembly for a well-protected Hindu Bengali province. On the other hand, in the immediate post-Partition phase, the Islamic polity of East Pakistan gave them the new status of minorities in their own ancestral land.³⁸ However, being equipped with English education and proper socio-cultural channels, many among them, upon realizing that their “homes” would be a part of the Muslim-majority East Pakistan, could sell off their properties, to immigrate and obtain a decent living within West Bengal. Based on these considerations, the East Bengali Hindu elite that features in the history of post-Partition West Bengal politics, does not fit into the popular refugee image signifying

³⁷ Joya Chatterji states: “...the founding fathers of West Bengal designed partition in the hope of restoring their privileges and reasserting their dominance in the new homeland”... with the desire to “reverse its long history of decline, survive the disruptions of partition and win back its rightful place in the all-India arena” (*The Spoils of Partition* 4).

³⁸ Shelley Feldman observes: “...what is signalled by the new status of the *bhadralok* as a political minority in East Pakistan was the unmasking of class relations that had been partially obscured, more discursively than in practice, in the guise of religion and its secularist and pluralist expressions” (Feldman, “Bengali State and Nation Making” 113).

poverty and deprivation.³⁹ Referring to how the dominating East Bengali landlords' progeny had, after Partition, become struggling *bhadralok* refugees, Ashok Mitra says:

Depending upon one's attitude, this could be a saga of nobility – how a people...have bravely withstood the turmoil of their fate; how, tucking in all false senses of dignity, the offspring of the upper-caste Hindu *bhadralok* have embraced the empirical correlates of the unfolding world. Alternatively, one can sum up the entire episode as part of the inevitable historical process...they are getting what they richly deserve because of the follies and foibles perpetrated by their blood-sucking ancestors (1535).

Dalits in Pre-Partition Bengal and Post-Partition West Bengal

During the pre-Partition phase in Bengal, Dalits had suffered the brunt of communalist rivalry between the Hindus and the Muslims. The *bhadralok* advocated programmes of “upliftment” among “Untouchables,” which aimed at proselytizing the Dalits from heterodox

³⁹ Anindita Dasgupta studies that many *bhadralok* economic migrants had simultaneous homes in Sylhet and the Brahmaputra districts and Cachar since 19 C. For them, Partition meant loss of “*desher bari*,” which, however, did not affect their intact job and property in Assam. Previously, Assam used to be a semi-feudal, semi-tribal self-ruled province. By the time an Assamese middle-class began to emerge, the Bengalis had occupied major government positions, leading to maldistribution of power and resources. Stereotypes of “lazy Assamese” as opposed to “disciplined Bengalis” allowed the latter’s “suitable” hegemonization. As a form of resistance, Assamese nationalism forwarded anti-Bengali/“outsider” opposition towards Sylheti Bengali immigrants. To counter the impact of the imposed Bengali language, Assam Sangrakshini Sabha was formed. Even as the Mountbatten Plan (1947) ceded Sylhet to East Pakistan, many “optees” kept trickling post-Partition. Bijoy Kumar Das states that these *bhadraloks* would treat Assam in tourist capacity with cameras in hand, enraging the local people (Dasgupta, “Partition Migration in Assam”). Talbot and Singh also reflect how Tripura’s indigenous identity was threatened with the economic and cultural influence of newly infiltrating East Bengali refugees, as the population swelled in (and following) the decade of the Great Calcutta Killing (1946). Added tensions sparked with the movement of the Muslim East Bengalis into Assam (Talbot and Singh, “Migration and Resettlement”). Sujata D. Hazarika similarly studies that most of the lands in North Bengal, which belonged to local Scheduled Castes, especially from the Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid races of Koch and Rajbanshis, were bought over by affluent immigrants from Bangladesh and the Marwari community. The Rajbanshi elites maintained distance from the Bengalis, calling them as “Vinnajati.” The Rajbanshi’s status were recurrently challenged in Bengali *bhadralok* writings since the pre-Partition period, such as Nagendranath Basu’s World Encyclopedia mentioning them as barbarians, and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay asserting in *Bangadarshan* that they cannot be synonymized with the Bengali Hindu identity (Hazarika, “Unrest and Displacement”). For more on Partition and the immigrants’ conflict with the pre-settled Scheduled Castes of North Bengal, also see Rup Kumar Barman’s *Contested Regionalism: A New Look on the History, Cultural Change and Regionalism of North Bengal and Lower Assam*.

Vaishnavism to mainstream Hinduism.⁴⁰ Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a Hindu revivalist monk and chief disciple of Saint Ramakrishna, said that the coming of the age of Truth would be marked by *Satya-Yuga*, “when there will be one caste (Brahman), one Veda, peace and harmony” (Chatterji, “Hindu and Muslim Tyranny” 191). However, contrary to this statement, Bengal’s bigotry against Dalits was realized in the *bhadralok*’s mass opposition to the Untouchability Abolition Bill of 1933 and the Depressed Classes Status Bill of 1934.⁴¹

In the mid-1940s, as scapegoats involved in elite Hindu-Muslim strife, Dalits from the Namasudra, the Rajbanshi and the Santhal groups were admitted to the Hindu community through compelling indoctrinations, and deployed in the vanguard of Hindu militancy. Such a strategy helped the Bengal Congress to win most of the Scheduled Caste seats in the Assembly elections of 1946. The death of Jitu Santal in a police encounter while enacting a “debased” form of Kali worship in the Adina mosque (1932), which he and his band of men had seized after assaulting the local Muslims, is one amongst the numerous incidents of aggression that involved the Dalits and the Muslims. As a “no-religion” people, whose allegiance to Hinduism had been no further than peripheral, Dalits were being exploited and killed in religious and political disputes, whose dogmas they could not identify with and whose ambitions would not serve their own ends.

⁴⁰ The Vaishnav cult and its massive acceptance in the plebeian culture since 15 C, as expressed through songs, dramatic performance (*jatra*), collective rituals, etc., was mainly in response to the pedantry of Brahminical hierarchy, whose chief patrons were the upper-class feudal lords (Sumanta Banerjee 1197).

⁴¹ These bills were meant to end the ostracism of “lower-caste” groups from mainstream social customs and indorse them with equal social rights as the caste Hindus. Regardless of the *bhadralok*’s caste chauvinism, land tenants had begun to defy the power of landlords, especially after the Government of India Act (1935), which had bestowed suffrage rights to the upper stratum peasants through introduction of direct elections and included them for the first time in the legislative arena. Earlier, only the most prosperous and the best educated – men who paid a minimum of one rupee in cess or *chaukidari* tax and who held graduate or equivalent degrees – had the right to vote (Chatterji, “Bengal Politics and the Communal Award” 32).

However, as Sekhar Bandopadhyay observes, the multiple layers within the agricultural peasant communities of East Bengal obviated any blanket categorization of Dalit-ness, as Dalits were further divided in terms of class. While the poverty-stricken Dalits were more concerned with economic upliftment and abolition of social hierarchies, many among them who had already availed upward mobility presented regressive views, willing to be institutionally accepted among traditional upper caste Hindus (“A Peasant Class in Protest” 147).⁴² So while on the one hand, most of the Dalits faced subordination by the Hindu *bhadralok* and the elite Muslims, on the other, the opportunists earned a peculiar status, becoming an interest group that bargained with mainstream political leaders.⁴³

⁴² Kshatriya Samiti (estd. 1910 by the Rajbansis) is an example of one such nodal point, where Dalit habits met the upper caste way of life. In the pre-Partition period, proselytization among Dalits caused many Namasudras to switch to staunch Hinduism, resulting in split among the Dalits, as is understood in the hierarchy exercised by “purified” Rajbangshi people on the “Palis” (who continued to adhere to their former “lowly” lifestyle). Rajbangshi leaders like Panchanan Barma or Jitu Santal were proponents of such pseudo-Brahminisation (Chatterji, “Hindu Unity and Muslim Tyranny” 199). With Barma becoming the first lawyer from among the Rajbansis and included within high Hinduism, his social and professional dependence on upper castes was revealed. The Bangiya Jana Sangha founded by Barma in collaboration with the upper caste members like U.N. Mukherjee and Digindranarayan Bhattacharya was dedicated to the cause of inter-caste alliance (Dutta 47). Dutta observes: “In contrast to other caste leaders who referred to their frustrating experiences as low caste organizers, Barma gave unqualified praise for a venture in a way that effaced its distinctive low caste character. He declared that it was imperative to bring about unity of different sections of Hindus, and benefit the nation. Barma represented the right wing of the organization” (47). At another part, Dutta notes that an educated class of Kaibarttas culturally distanced themselves from the uneducated, leading to a schism within the caste (50). Hierarchy among the Dalits is also observable in other parts of India, as M.V. Nadkarni notes that in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the “right hand” Scheduled Castes, mainly comprising agricultural labour, consider themselves superior to “left hand” Scheduled Castes, chiefly associated with leather work and scavenging (Nadkarni 2165). K.L. Sharma notes that the “upper” echelon Scheduled Castes often share hearty relationships with the “high-castes” (*Social Stratification in India: Issues and Themes*, quoted in Ramkrishna Mukherjee 1761).

⁴³ Yet, how such empowerment directly advantaged the poorer Dalits remains an ambiguous issue. Bandopadhyay’s research discloses a few extraordinary cases, particularly in the Jessore and Khulna districts, where more fervent expressions of anti-Swadeshi movements among the Namasudras threatened to sabotage the poorer Dalit masses, if they disagreed to use foreign goods. The newly struggling group of *bhadralok* Dalits, as is formed by these Namasudra leaders, displayed contrasting social ethos with respect to their public and private image.

At the time of Partition, while the Scheduled Caste leader Jogendranath Mandal had joined force with Hussein Suhrawardy in claiming that the Scheduled Castes opposed Partition,⁴⁴ Bandyopadhyay's records imply that the majority of Dalits from East and North Bengal had rejected Mandal's leadership and collaborated with the Hindu Mahasabha's faction. Thus, on the one hand, Mandal dismissed the idea of a casteist Hindu state, thereby pledging either to stay back in Pakistan or champion the separatist programs of "Dalisthan" for Dalits and "Rajasthan" for Rajbanshis ("Caste and the Territorial Nation" 222). On the other hand, the poor Scheduled Caste masses mostly supported the mainstream Hindu sentiments.⁴⁵ Influenced by Congress and Hindu Mahasabha politicians, they proposed integrationist positions, by agreeing to operate across caste and class lines, in order to see themselves chiefly as citizens of a Hindu majority nation-state, rather than an autonomist group redrawn into codified boundaries. However, to their betrayal, the Partition had not resulted in the inclusion of Namasudra provinces of Bakarganj, Faridpur, Jessore and Khulna, and the Rajbansi areas of Rangpur and Dinajpur, within the Hindu Bengali geo-political space of West Bengal. Unlike the *bhadralok* East Bengalis, Dalits were not

⁴⁴ Jogen Mandal had rejected the offers of "prestigious" and "powerful" posts in Congress, Forward Bloc and Hindu Mahasabha. As variant manifestations of the Hindutva politics, all these parties commonly expected him to dispose off with his Dalit identity. Such conscious evasion of his particular caste belonging was, however, not a sign of egalitarianism on the part of mainstream political groups, but an indirect mode of subjugation, by attempting to reabsorb him within the casteist body of Hinduism. In light of that, Mandal's support for the formation of Pakistan, an Islamic state, was because "Shudratva" (Dalitness) would be an unknown concept in such a polity (Debesh Roy 886).

⁴⁵ Targeting for peasantry political mobilisation through its propagandist campaigns, the Hindu Mahasabha tagged local agrarian disputes with wider political conflicts, and initiated riots between peasants of the two communities. By the 1940s, the Hindu-Muslim atrocity no longer remained a high-caste political affair. For example, in Mahasabha and local Congress committee's joint meeting in Bakarganj district (April–May 1947), as well as in meetings held by Mahasabha branches at places like Jhalakati, Goila, Tarkibandar and Ramshidhi Bazar in the Gournadi police station, at Nazirpur and Pirojpur in Bakarganj district, Rajair in Faridpur, or Balarambati in Hooghly, where resolutions were passed in favour of Partition, the maximum representation was from among the local Namasudra and other Dalit groups (Bandyopadhyay, "Caste and the Territorial Nation" 226). Moreover, several Dalit organisations, such as the Bangiya Yadava Mahasabha, the Assam-Banga Yogi Sammilani of Nadia or the Bengal Kshattria Kaibartta Mahasabha, actively propagated the idea of Partition (227).

prepared with socio-economic capital to resettle themselves in a new land. The political decision, which misused their ignorant support, resulted in undoing their social mobility and caste-based unity, causing them to migrate in destitute conditions to India. Starting from the scratch, they could possibly gain foothold in West Bengal only by fighting with the local *Goalas* (milkman community) and Muslims.⁴⁶

In the immediate post-Partition Indian setting, Hindu Dalits were the most disadvantaged in every sense. They did not get the espousal that they expected from the native West Bengalis, who, despite belonging to the same linguistic group, generally maintained a distance from the refugees. Dalits were also left unaided by the *bhadralok* migrants, with whom they had a wide socio-economic and cultural gap. As well, they were shut out by the Muslim peasants and wage-workers from East Pakistan, who had previously been socially and economically closest to their mode of living.⁴⁷ While Dalit refugees spoke Bengali, observed the Hindu creed, they did not appear in what was supposed to represent the mainstream “essence” of West Bengal (or India) and its future aspirations.

The caste-class factor directly came up in the 1950s’ rehabilitation project under *bhadralok*-ruled Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray’s Congress ministry. The main policy of the Congress ministry was to disperse the Dalit Bengali refugees outside of West Bengal, in secluded lands

⁴⁶ In fact, Dalit refugees, who had once been the closest allies of the Muslim peasants in East Bengal, adopted a strong Hindu fundamentalist outlook, once the impoverished Muslim refugees started infiltrating in the border districts of West Bengal post-1971 and threatened to confiscate their lands.

⁴⁷ According to reports from *Jugantar* (a Bengali newspaper), there were three kinds of refugee cards – the mass willing to leave West Bengal, those who with a little support could settle in West Bengal, and finally the greatest percentage of people who were “low castes and classes” and totally reliant on the government for existence. This last category of Dalit Hindu refugees were cogs of the Central and the West Bengal governments’ experiments, and a group who had to act according to the circumstance wrought by high-flying political leaders.

like Andaman Islands and Dandakaranya.⁴⁸ According to a statistical estimate made by Dr. Ray, out of the entire group of Andaman deportees, 11 per cent were landless peasants, 33 per cent carpenters, turners, small shop managers, tailors, fishermen, etc, 1.5 per cent labours, and only 6 per cent land-owning class and an assortment of other classes (speech on February 1 1949, Basu, *Udbastu Andolan* 45, translation mine). The lower-class people had earlier led an insular life in East Pakistan, and would not be incorporated in mainstream nationalistic political movements. Because they did not have monetary hold, they could not propose any choice about their desired style of living in the post-Partition period. Instead, they became pawns in the mission for fashioning a progressive, independent India. The new government, in the process of initially supporting these people, also imposed its own paternalistic ideals and tried to instil a sense of gratitude in them. The Dalit refugees were urged to live up to the criteria of “socially useful” people. For example, Prafulla Chandra Sen (Chief Minister of West Bengal 1961-67) suggested that these people make Andaman agriculturally one of the highest rice-producing regions (Basu 66).

With the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s regime unbarred the border only for that section of refugees (also called *sharanarthis*, literally: refuge-seeker), who had fled during the Liberation War. Statistically, the greatest fraction of this last batch of escapees being Dalits, they could enjoy the mobility that was sealed for the upper-caste upper-

⁴⁸ Advocates bifurcate on the debate of whether the Bengali nationalism could be better facilitated by keeping the refugees within or outside of Bengal. According to Dalit intellectuals like Jogendranath Mandal, dispersing the Dalit Bengalis outside of West Bengal was a *bhadralok* strategy for keeping the political power in the hands of upper-castes. However, opposition members like Sudhir Chandra Ray Chaudhuri, Bankim Mukherjee and Hemanta Kumar Basu had vehemently criticized the Central Government’s policy of deporting the “excess” Bengalis outside of West Bengal. Mukherjee saw this population as particularly important in defining a well-orchestrated Bengali community (Samir Kumar Das 113). On the other hand, Dwaipayan Sen points out that the post-Partition West Bengal politics has maintained efforts to mould the emergence of compliant Dalit leadership and public, by marginalizing radical tendencies. For more on West Bengal’s caste-class politics viz-a-viz rehabilitation policies, see Sen’s “An Absent-Minded Casteism?” and Das’ “State Response to the Refugee Crisis.”

class migrants (*udbaastus*, literally: uprooted), who had crossed the border earlier. Yet, on the flip side of this advantage, following many *sharanarthi*'s return to Bangladesh, the ruling Congress government in West Bengal used coercive means to send the remaining poor (and mostly Dalit) Bengali refugees to settle in Dandakaranya forestry. Because it was known by that time that the Dandakaranya Project, like Andaman, expected them to clear lands or do similar rigorous labour, and because it was also established by then that the land conferred for Dandakaranya Project was not arable, Dalit refugees resisted the government's attempt to send them away outside of Bengal. Those amongst them who went to Dandakaranya had fallen prey to the miscommunication among the West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh state governments and the Dandakaranya Development Authority (Dasgupta, "Dandakaranya Ghure" 48).⁴⁹

Following their disillusionment about the Congress Party's role in refugee rehabilitation, 1959 onwards a symbiotic relationship started to grow between the Communist Party and the refugees.⁵⁰ However, the condition of Dalits was no better under the communist government in post-Partition West Bengal. The Communist Party, which professed to be the representative of

⁴⁹ In fact, Barun Sengupta points out that, starting with the Nehru-Liaquat Pact that had left the Bengal borders forever fluid, there was no initiative taken either by the Central and the State governments or by the newspapers, in properly settling the refugees in Dandakaranya and Andaman. While Siddhartha Shankar Ray's government and Indira Gandhi's proclamation of Emergency had openly confined these refugees under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and destroyed the Mana camp, there is no account of expenditure for the 100 crores of Central government's budget allotted for Dandakaranya's development (Sengupta 44-45).

⁵⁰ Talbot and Singh's research shows that while the Communist Party of India (CPI) had already begun to recruit in "illegal" post-1950 colonies of Bally and Howrah municipalities, the West Bengal Congress' Hooghly faction fanned anti-refugee sentiments and disenfranchised East Bengali leaders, causing a major decay in the immigrant *bhadralok*'s longstanding support for Congress (Talbot and Singh 117). Among the reasons for Bengali immigrants' penchant for Leftist politics was the decline of Bengal's weight in the all-India Hindutva parties following Shyama Prasad Mookherjee's death, and the shift of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's focus from Bengali Hindu refugees to the population in India's Hindi-speaking belt. Owing to cultural discrepancy, there was already a noticeable clash between Hindi-speakers and the East Bengali refugees. Particularly in Calcutta, the original owners of Jadavpur-adjointing squatter colonies were the Marwaris. For all these reasons, and also because the East Bengali immigrants themselves were victims of communalist politics, could they find their concerns resonate with the ostensible principles of the Communist Party.

the “*sarbahara*” or wholly despoiled masses in the immediate post-Partition decades, later on forwarded demands and agitations arising only from class-based issues, ignoring in the process the question of caste. Taking for granted its support from Dalits, the trajectory of the Leftist Party in Bengal ironically took on an urban, educated, middle-class turn, retiring from its initial agenda of serving all refugees in general, to being taken over by a particular class from amongst the refugee community. In other words, the puritan Leftist allegiance majorly encompassed the upper- or middle-class high-caste Hindu immigrants, either formerly cushioned within the *bhadralok* identification or afterwards permeating into the coterie by means of economic and cultural clout.⁵¹

During the implementation and failure of the Dandakaranya Project, the then Leftist opposition leaders campaigning against the Congress government, such as Jyoti Basu, Kironmoy Nanda, Ram Chatterjee, and the Refugee Development Association’s President Satish Mandal, had promised to resettle the poor Dalit refugees in the Sunderban areas of West Bengal, if they came to power. However, when the Dalits actually succeeded in occupying the Marichjhanpi area of Sunderbans, the Communist Party, which had by then formed government, betrayed its former pro-proletarian image and instead uprooted Dalits. The Revolutionary Socialist Party

⁵¹ According to D. Bandopadhyay, Tebhaga movement (1946) testifies to the Communist and other Left Party’s petty bourgeois origin, despite their “de-classed” ideological basis. Their middle-class fetishism prevented them from demanding tenancy rights for the *bargadars* as recommended by the Floud Commission. Being afraid to oppose the middle-class *bhadralok* who led the independence movement, the memorandum submitted by the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha in 1939 did nothing to directly repeal the Tenancy Act of 1928, which denied legal rights to the class of cultivators known as “bargadars,” “adhiars,” “bhagchasis” or “bhatars.” Bandopadhyay notes that post-1977, the CPI (M) and the Left Front comprised mainly the conformist groups of middle- and upper-class peasantry that had previously been Congress allies. The survey of class character of the newly elected Panchayat members of the 1978 CPI (M) evinces a particularly elite leaning, with only a 7% of the *bargadar* and landless labour groups, and a remaining 93% of the landowning rural masses (Bandopadhyay, “Tebhaga Movement in Bengal: A Retrospect”). Regarding the Communist government formed in West Bengal since 1977, Ross Mallick notes that while succeeding the immediate objective of breaking Congress’ monopoly and making inroads towards power, the Leftist leaders refrained from more radical alternatives and rather supported a status quo. Despite “sufficient scope within the Indian constitution for reforms conducive to Communist growth in a revolutionary direction” (Mallick, “A Problematic Legacy” 3), such options were impeded by class and group interests.

(R.S.P.), a Marxist-Leninist faction of the Left-wing and supposed “owner” of Marichjhanpi, would ominously patrol the area. Testimonials by Nirmalkanti Dhali and Radhikaranjan Biswas attest to the brutality subsequently instigated by the Communist government, who encouraged the police force to carry out random massacres of Dalits and sabotage their lives and property.⁵² With the aim of evacuating the destitute masses, the Communist government falsely indicted them for offences like collusion with foreign spies, firearm training activities, smuggling of national treasure and destruction of conserved forest property. By January 24, 1979, the Marichjhanpi area was completely annexed by government-sponsored goons and absolute food blockage enacted. Following Professor Samar Guha’s initiative to inform the Central Government about such animosities, a three-member committee, including Prasannabhai Mehta, Lakshminarayan Pande and Mangaldeo Visharad visited Marichjhanpi for inspection on March 22, 1979. However, the West Bengal government’s agents informed them that the deaths were caused by starvation and dearth of medication. Subsequently, the report produced to Prime Minister Morarji Desai in the 1980s had no problematic remarks about the Marichjhanpi incident, and the Centre too, relying on Left Government’s management, refrained from any kind of strong decision. Furthermore, in order to diminish the impact of the carnage before public eyes, popular newspapers like *The Statesman* (English and Bengali) took up the function of allaying the charges that were inflicted on the Left government.⁵³ The Marichjhanpi incident,

⁵² Jyoti’s Basu’s speech, circulated as leaflets by the Government of West Bengal titled “Dandakaranya Theke Firey Asha Udbastu der Proti Mukhyomontrir Abedan” (“Chief Minister’s Petition to the Dandakaranya Returnee Refugees”, April 11, 1978) reverted the previous promises, asking the Danadakaranya-returned refugees to retrace to the Malkangiri areas, which would be developed in the near future (*Chhinna Desh* 41).

⁵³ Similar attitude of defending the Left government is available in the immigrant *bhadralok* writer-intellectual Sunil Gangopadhyay’s words: “Many have said that riling the refugee issue is a way of putting the West Bengal Left Front government into trouble. I don’t think so. Even if not highly revolutionary, Left Front is running the government quite well. As far as I know, the Left Front’s ministers are not personally corrupt, and truly dedicated to constructive work” (Gangopadhyay, “Marichjhanpi Samparke Joruri Kotha” 66, translation mine).

thus, confirms the ultimate *bhadralok* orientation of the reigning CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist). The Left government's self-perpetuation and reproduction of power through violence unveiled its partisan stance and upper-caste attitudes.⁵⁴

Citing from the context of the Marichjhanpi incident (1978), a correspondent observes that the Communist government's ambition for 25% West Bengali Muslim votes, and targets for peaceable relationships with Bangladesh and the working classes of Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, could not be accomplished without sacrificing the prospects of Bengali Dalit refugees.⁵⁵ This is despite the fact that the Marichjhanpi refugees, most of whom belonged to impoverished Dalit sections, had lent long-term inputs in making "rulers" out of the "Leftist fugitives," by constantly supplying man-force to the party's early barricades and civil disobediences, such as the All Bengal Teachers' Association movement (1954), the anti-merger movement (1956) and a series of food movements.⁵⁶ It was therefore not unwarranted for the Dalits to consider

⁵⁴ For more details on the Marichjhanpi massacre, see Nirmalkanti Dhali's "Swadhinatar Swad!" and Radhikaranjan Biswas' "Marichjhanpir Smriti" in *Nijer Kothay Marichjhanpi*, Anoop Kumar, Ajay Hela and Nilesh Kumar's "Marichjhapi and the Revenge of Bengali Bhadrakalok," Ross Mallick's "Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre," Annu Jalais' "Dwelling on Morichjhanpi: When Tigers Became 'Citizens,' Refugees 'Tiger-Food,'" Jatin Bala's *Shikharh Chhenrha Jeeban*, Nakul Mallik's *Khoma Nei* and Monobina Gupta's *Left Politics in Bengal: Time Travels among Bhadrakalok Marxists*.

⁵⁵ One must not conclude about the condition of underdog Muslims in West Bengal from this apparent favoritism. 2001 census operations in West Bengal reflect that the underprivileged Muslims, when compared to their Hindu counterparts, have not received adequate socio-political support from the state. The early 20th century reservations in the employment for the Muslims were opposed by the Hindu fundamentalists. Assuming that the caste-system was intrinsic of the Hindus, the judiciary had excluded the Muslim Dalits from entitlements of "Scheduled Castes." The same rule that espoused the Sikh and the Buddhist Dalits for Scheduled Caste quota benefits in 1950 and 1990 respectively, failed to discharge itself in the case of the Islam and the Christian converts (Abhijit Dasgupta 92). These underclass Muslims were included in the "Other Backward Classes" list with recommendations of the Mandal Commission. Moreover, unlike several other states, West Bengal had no job reservation for the Muslim minorities, despite their bleak performance in education and very low public sector representation. Compared to Assam, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, a very low percentage of Muslims were employed in the governmental jobs in West Bengal (94).

⁵⁶ In Ajay Basu Roy's words: "Partition in a way has strengthened the Communist Party more than before...In this part of Bengal, there was hardly a section from amongst the labour class that could measure up to the lower-class

themselves as CPI-M government's allies and expect the Marxist rulers to be their "saviour."⁵⁷

On the other hand, The Dalits' exclusion from *bhadralok* politics in a Hindu-majority West Bengal reaffirms Mafidul Huq's assertion that communal rift was only one amongst the several factors of differences among the Bengalis, and that Partition along religious lines could not have possibly solved the crisis in its entirety. There were clear degrees of gradations in post-Partition West Bengal, where Hindu upper-caste migrants were the foremost privileged candidates for rehabilitation, at the cost of relegating the needs of Dalits and Muslims.

Squatter Colonies and *Bhadralok*'s Caste-Class Power

The East Bengali upper-caste middle-class population that settled in squatter colonies of West Bengal, especially Calcutta, restored *bhadralok-chhotolok* discriminations, such that these colonies became spaces rife with caste-class tensions. The *bhadra* refugees' role in cleansing their colonies of Dalit refugees point to their loyalty to the *babu*-class' social ascendancy since the colonial times, which, as I have shown above, strongly advanced the decision of Bengal's Partition. Replication of such hierarchy in the matter of space allotment in post-Partition West Bengal greatly privileged middle-class Bengali refugees in achieving their desired lofty lifestyle (Uditi Sen).⁵⁸ While there is no denying that the refugees in the north-western frontier were

struggling refugees today, who are presently considered as the Communist Party's assets" (Shibajiprotim Basu 86-87, paraphrasing mine).

⁵⁷ A recent examination by Sekhar Bandopadhyay points out to the Dalit immigrants' assimilation with the Muslims during the 2008 Panchayat election at Nadia. "Matua-Dalit-Sankhyalagh Sangrami Mancha," a political-group aiming to revive the Dalit-Muslim political alliance, thus debunks the failure on the part of the mainstream *bhadralok* politics since the pre-Partition times, in organizing the Dalits primarily as Hindu Bengalis rather than as Scheduled Caste constituencies (Bandopadhyay, "Partition and the Ruptures" 465).

⁵⁸ The Jadavpur Association had announced that "only *bhadraloks* would be allotted plots within the colony" and further, an "action squad" implemented to eliminate the "*chhotolok*" refugees and in their place, make room for "suitably cultured and substantially better-off *bhadraloks* of East Bengal" (Sen 70). What is more, Bijoygarh Colony maintains complete silence about the absence of some of the early Dalit residents, who were, in the first place, rescued from the Sealdah Station. Such silence confirms to these families' total obliteration, both from the geographical span of the settlement and the collective memory of the *bhadralok* residents. The residents also

undoubtedly helped with much larger aids by the central government, and relocated within India more systematically and with greater benefits, in West Bengal, two facts, according to Sen's study, represent the gist of Partition's aftermath – the deepening of *bhadralok*-Dalit identity differences throughout the post-colonial times even though, on occasions, such gaps seemed to have dissolved, and the absence of any actual pan-Bengali refugee identity outside of the recreated class-caste power gradations (72).⁵⁹ This observation, as I elaborate in Chapter 1, is reinforced from the writings of Adhir Biswas and Manoranjan Byapari.

Romola Sanyal and Nilanjana Chatterjee observe that faced with public and governmental rebuff, the *bhadralok* immigrants who settled in the squatter colonies had often resorted to politicizing their demands as refugee citizens. In a bid to be included within the Indian nation-state, they recurrently referred to the drastic “fall” of their social and economic status.⁶⁰ Chatterjee's research reveals that apart from fear of physical harm, anxiety about lack of

forget that before the colonies sprouted, the military barracks of Bijoygarh were bought by wealthy and middle-class natives (Sanyal 72), and that the Central government had promised compensation to the landlords of the *jabardakhal* plots, but in many cases such initiatives were stalled due to funding issues (80). Romola Sanyal notes that the *jabardakhal* settlements on the Muslim Waqf lands reflect a hegemonic practice of urban planning, as implied in a *tabula rasa*. Similar to the *tabula rasa* existing in the modernist architecture and urban planning rhetoric, where the architects, in the roles of “master subjects,” erase entire parts of a city, the squatters depicted the *jabardakhal* plots as ahistorical vacant wastelands, awaiting development. The founding of *jabardakhal* colonies, thus, carry a notion of agency, and the migrants' engagement with larger social and political forces in West Bengal is made possible through strategic annulment of the presence of former residents in these places. As most of the earlier occupants were Muslims, the Hindu immigrants' attitude of acquiring and bettering these supposedly “empty” lands reflect a vindictive as well as a condescending tone (71).

⁵⁹ Sen notes that the importance of mythic battles waged by refugees produces a homogenized refugee identity in opposition to the external Other, as embodied in ruthless landlords in the host society and the state. It obscures differences in caste, class and cultural capital, which divides the East Bengali refugees in terms of the kind of rehabilitation to which particular refugee families had access (57).

⁶⁰ According to Shelley Feldman's study, one of the major after-effects of Partition in Bengal was the postcolonial challenge of “(re)making communities” out of the node of contact between the established West Bengali residents and the recently migrating East Bengalis into the new territories of West Bengal. Tensions arose due to the dissimilar essences of “Bengaliness.” These differences became visible in terms of religion, ethnicity and place, complicating the “state-making and nation-making projects” (Feldman, “Bengali State and Nation Making” 112). In addition, migration also acted towards fracturing the relations among the village kin, altering the “imagined community” for both the West and the East (114).

economic opportunities and loss of social standing also acted as incentives in the East Bengali *bhadralok*'s decision to migrate to West Bengal. While Bengal had for a long time been a *bhadralok* province where upper-castes spoke for all, the Partition had resulted in a complex situation, where the East Bengalis' problems regarding jobs etc. had to be undertaken by the West Bengali elites. Hence, acquisition and self-rehabilitation on the part of *bhadralok* immigrants in the squatter colonies was a means to downplay their refugee identity with class-caste superiority. The refugees' determination not to go back to East Pakistan played a powerful role in forging their identity as claimants of legal protection and sympathy in West Bengal.

Education helped these *bhadralok* immigrants survive the tough employment scenarios in a thickly populated and economically broke post-Partition Calcutta, as well as mark their own culture apart from the poor urban refugees. Sanyal notes that upon news of possible police raids, *bhadralok* squatters would overnight erect illegal semi-permanent structures of makeshift schools, deterring the authority from uprooting the colony on humanitarian grounds (74). The presence of colony schools laid emphasis not only on a sign of deep-rooted settlement, but symbolized a futuristic commitment, as initiated by responsible citizens. Thus, education also helped to morally justify their act of *jabardakhal* (forceful land occupation).⁶¹ In addition, the squatters often used their networks to obtain government recognition and official certification for their schools.

⁶¹ According to Udit Sen's study, almost every refugee colony, essentially comprising the upper-caste Hindu immigrants, boasted at least one secondary and several primary schools, which trained the next generation for employment and hence economic rehabilitation, helping to maintain the educated and cultured *bhadralok*'s identity that the middle-class squatters clung to (Sen 64). Recruiting teachers from among themselves served the cause of learning as well as forming a well-knit bourgeois community life.

The *bhadralok* squatters' indifference towards the non-*bhadralok* refugees is further proven in their withdrawal from the movement called for the rehabilitation of Bettiah deserters,⁶² which had ultimately become a failure. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's words: "the petty bourgeoisie squatters who had very little relationship with the lowly *Namasudra* peasant before migration felt no real concern for the fate of these agriculturalists" (*The Marginal Men* 178-179).

Regarding the hierarchy within the Netaji Nagar colony where he grew up, Manas Ray comments:

The vast majority of those who came were middle-class people with some urban exposure. Those who did not fall in this bracket – fishermen, carpenters, hut-builders, masons, barbers – tended to concentrate in two adjacent wards lying at one end of the locality... In retrospect, it seems amazing how little I knew of that world, how subtle and comprehensive was the process of normalization of divisions (quoted in Sen 70).

In another context, Ray reflects: "...Today...the refugees present a sharply variegated scenario – from those powerfully entrenched in the bureaucracy and professions to the emaciate vendors at busy market sections or the near-pauper rag-pickers in the eastern flanks of the city" ("Growing Up Refugee" 151-152).⁶³

According to Sen, the mythicized nature of "muscle and grit" that the typical East Bengali "self-settled" *bhadralok* squatters celebrate, often obscures the fact that many among

⁶² The camp-dwellers of Bettiah in Bihar had launched a peaceful movement in May 1958, for the fulfilment of their demands of improved living and better economic conditions in camp-settlements, as well as for their rehabilitation. It had influenced the Dalit Bengali refugees, who refused to go outside West Bengal. Like the Bettiah rebels, the Bengalis demonstrated massive civil disobedience in a Gandhian way, which resulted in more than 30,000 camp refugees being arrested (Basu Raychaudhury, "Life After Partition" 11).

⁶³ Manas Ray thinks it is important to shift the focus from the hackneyed metaphors about the post-Partition eternal "unhoming" and subsequent community-building, to the humdrum and facticity of everyday life (see Ray's email in Tutun Mukherjee 76). Yet, he also poignantly remembers how Calcutta's *bhadralokdom* had in the past denied the colony middle-class families, and sympathizes with this section of elite immigrants, which in the present has completely transcended its "refugee" conditions. His dwelling in a collective East Bengali upper-caste nostalgia becomes clearer in his admiration for the stereotypical figure of the "more confident" refugee *bhadramahila*, who can multi-task as an efficient homemaker, a nurturing mother and a bread-winning sister.

them have used affective ties and appealed for help from the influential East Bengali administrators and lawyers. In most cases, the bureaucrats and officials serving the cause of rehabilitation were from East Bengal, who helped the middle-class squatters achieve their ends.⁶⁴ At the legal level, activities of refugee organizations such as the All Bengal Refugee Committee (1948), which made major protests at Raj Bhawan with a representation of about 15,000 refugees during Nehru's visit to Calcutta on January 14, 1949, helped in forcibly occupying lands in North Calcutta. Additionally, a joint force by the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC) and the Refugee Eviction Resistance Committee had pushed the B.C.Roy-led government's Eviction Bill (1951) to be amended into a new version called "The Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Act." According to this amendment, the displaced persons engaged in illegal occupation of lands had to be accommodated (Deb 76). Further, this movement had resulted in a shift in the definition of the bona fide refugee, to include evacuees till December 31, 1950, rather than the previous deadline of June 25, 1948 (Deb 78).

Renuka Ray, the erstwhile Minister of Rehabilitation, claimed that the central government's focus on camp refugees had left the formalizing and developing procedures of squatter colonies incomplete (Sen 70), whereas the Minister of Finance reckoned an estimated 15

⁶⁴ Being an immigrant from East Bengal, Kamalkrishna Ray, West Bengal's Relief Minister during Dr. P.C. Ghosh's brief tenure as Chief Minister, had opened innumerable barracks and military camps to the middle-class refugees for settlement. Researched facts prove that victory in the famous Layalka case involved supports from powerful East Bengalis in controlling positions. For instance, Amulya Banerjee, the officer-in-chief of the Tollygunge Police Station had granted the Bijoygarh residents bail, and in turn was promised a couple of plots for free in the "illegal" property. Additionally, the criminal lawyer Chinta Haran Ray from Subidra in Dhaka had taken up the refugees' case free of charge (Sen 60). To cite more, following his taking up a ministerial post connected with the Calcutta Municipal Development Association (1977), Prasanta Sur, a refugee activist, had used the funds allocated for slum development to improve exclusively the refugee areas. Paradoxically, the Department of Refugee Rehabilitation continued to press the Central government for aid (Sanyal 80). In fact, Sanyal concludes that the *bhadralok* refugee movements, mainly instigated by the squatter colony residents, were precursors of the culture of *dharnas* (sit-ins and strikes) in Calcutta, which put the city to halt in order to achieve an end. Such a method has been time and again employed by the Communist Party and others, making it a trademark of post-Partition West Bengal politics.

lakhs of refugees from “outside camps” having received government grants amounting to 48.5 crores. Sen’s essay also agrees to this statistics: “...far from being averse to government aid, the squatters were adept at obtaining concessions and exemptions from the authorities” (74). As several scholars agree, rather than carrying traces of a downtrodden status, popular slogans such as “Amra kara? Bastuhara!” (“Who are we? Refugees!”) signalled the arrival of a new “power in the land” (Sen 57).

CHAPTER 1: “Politics of Sentiment” Challenged in Dalit Refugees’ Writings

Introduction

This chapter examines the representation of Dalit refugees’ experiences in post-Partition West Bengal through Adhir Biswas’ memoirs *Deshbhager Smriti (Memory of Partition 2010, Bengali)* and *Allar Jomite Paa (Stepping on the Land of Allah 2012, Bengali)* and Manoranjan Byapari’s autobiographical work *Itibritte Chandal Jibon (Memoir of Chandal Life 2012, Bengali)*. In terms of the literary representation of Bengali refugee, until recently it was only the voice of the *bhadralok* class that was heard, which spoke for all sections of refugees. I suggest that the Bengali refugee-ness cannot be constructed as a “homogenized” phenomenon, belonging only to the *bhadralok* class.⁶⁵ Such a representation screens the non-*bhadralok* Dalit and Muslim refugee’s voice, whom the East Bengali *bhadralok* had socio-economically subjugated till before the Partition. Because Biswas and Byapari are respectively from the castes of barber and *Chandal*, their identities and experiences differ from that of the prototypical East Bengali “gentleman.” As immigrant first-generation Dalit literates, their perspectives⁶⁶ and conception of

⁶⁵ For details on the term *bhadralok* and its history, see Introduction of the thesis.

⁶⁶ The Dalit literary movement began in Marathi language, before moving to Telugu and Kannada. It does not feature prominently in Bengali until the 1930s and 1940s, even though Matua Sahitya movement was an early precursor of the grassroots scholarship in Bengal. Matua Sahitya emerged in the 19 C under the Vaishnava cult, and its chief motivator was Harichand Biswas (Thakur, 1812-1878), a Namasudra from East Bengal. His son Guruchand Thakur emphasized the importance of education in bringing social changes and consciousness among the Dalits. Most of the Matua creativity expressed itself through story-telling (*kathakata*), folk plays (*jatra*) and rhymed couplets (*kobigaan*). While a major part of these oral literatures is lost, writers like Nityananda Halder, Narayan Gosai, Manindra Ray, Upendranath Biswas and others posthumously collected in print some of Harichand Thakur’s works. Bengal was brought into the purview of pan-Indian Dalit movement, when Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the central figure of Dalit protests, was elected to the constituent assembly from Bengal by the enterprise of Jogendranath Mandal. Even though the subject of caste discrimination has been time and again addressed in the writings of mainstream authors, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Manik Bandopadhyay, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Satinath Bhaduri and other “progressive” writers from the Kallol and Kalalikulam groups in the 1930s and 1940s, the Dalits assert that an authentic picture of their own experience can be portrayed only by a Dalit. Between 1947 and 2000, many little magazines and journals have been started for the Dalit cause, some of the prominent ones being *Suhrid* (1912), *Pataka* (1914), *Jagaran* (1943), and *Nabaarun*, *Nabarupa*, *Bahujan Darpan*, and others, from the 1960s and 1970s. Following Maharashtra’s

the post-Partition moments create a field of knowledge outside of the mainstream East Bengali *bhadralok* notions,⁶⁷ which have been regulating Bengal Partition narratives and memory. For example, the characters in Biswas and Byapari's works are not the stock "*bhadra*" émigrés, who proclaim perpetual moral uprightness. Instead, the *chhotolok*-turned-*bhadralok* characters in their narratives form a style of thought detached both from the "elite" and the "underdog" classifications. I support my argument by exploring the authorial positions of Byapari and Biswas, who are at the same time writers, vagabonds, activists and anti-socials, and therefore do not carry the ideology of Bengali *bhadralok* immigrants. Byapari and Biswas' post-Partition experiences challenge the existing corpus of Bengal Partition literature in terms of space politics, familial and cultural sensibilities as well as literacy.

I find various features of testimonial literature explaining Manoranjan Byapari's narrative style. Testimonial literature transforms the objects to subjects, while also changing the nature of that subject (Gugelberger and Kearney 8). It aims at speaking to "others" than one's "inner self"

model, Nakul Mullik founded the Bangiya Dalit Lekhak Parishad (Bengal Dalit Writers Association, 1987), which runs the journal *Gram Bangla* since 1978. Dalit literature in Bengal has flourished in different genres, including short stories, novels, poetry, non-fictions, historical and theoretical reflections, with some of the well-known authors being Ranjit Kumar Sikdar, Nitish Biswas, Dhurjati Naskar, Jagadish Mandal, Manohar Biswas, Kapil Krishna Thakur, Shyamal Pramanik, Anil Ranjan Biswas, Mukunda Bihari Mullik and Advaita Mallabharman, among many others. Even though the key theme for these writers is the discriminatory nature of Hinduism and the injustice meted out to the "lower-caste" people, some of them also look at the Partition of Bengal and expose the upper-caste *bhadralok* politics. For example, Nakul Mullik, Jatin Bala and Radhikaranjan Biswas, besides Manoranjan Byapari and Adhir Biswas, write about camp life experience and mass killings in the Marichjhanpi areas of Sunderbans. For more on Dalit authors, see Manoranjan Byapari's "Is There Dalit Writing in Bangla?" and Manohar Mouli Biswas' "Bengali Dalit Literature and Culture: A Dignity Discourse."

⁶⁷ I use "East Bengali *bhadralok* notions" in the same sense as the term "master narrative" used by Gyanendra Pandey. By "master narrative," Pandey refers to British interpretations of the communal violence and identity-making in colonial India (*The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* x). In both the cases, the representations are essentialized rather than corresponding with reality. In the same way, Shelley Feldman asserts that the refugee *bhadralok*'s memory-building through artistic creations leads to "meta-narratives"... "to be all inclusive and depend on their ability to alter, transform, or incorporate other prevailing, oppositional narratives." Such *bhadralok* memorial exercise is similar to the "nationalist conscience" in its "... struggle against other ways of seeing, other moralities, which express the historical experiences of the dominated" (Alonso 1994: 380, quoted in Feldman "Feminist Interruptions" 176).

(Ochiai 369), relates to the theme of a larger cause (380) and represents the documentary reality of a whole people who were previously “voiceless” in the narratives (Gugelberger and Kearney 9). Moreover, what Rigoberta Menchú defines as testimonials being works in which “the self cannot be defined in individual terms but only as a collective self engaged in a common struggle” (Gugelberger and Kearney 9) is also prominent in Byapari’s *Itibritte Chandal Jibon*. Additionally, as a typical trait of autobiography, Byapari’s work is detailed in terms of dates, events, places and movements, rather than a fictionalized emotional content. Instead of trauma, a politically active and confident narrative voice asserts a distinct identity through narrating life’s different experiences, using a chronological mode of narration. Yet, as I discuss in one of the sections below, Byapari’s narrative voice is evidently bifurcated. Readers can discern that after a point, the *bhadralok* writer’s voice takes over the Dalit victim’s voice. The assertiveness of narratorial Self in *Itibritte Chandal Jibon* makes it a representative text for Dalit first-generation literate refugees.

Byapari’s family originates from the grassroots “Untouchable” community of the Mandals, from Turukkhali near Pirichpur, in the district of Barisal (now in Bangladesh). After Byapari’s grandfather had entered a small business but incurred heavy loss, the fellow villagers had humorously replaced their original family name of Mandal with “Byapari” (literally meaning “trader”). He mentions that his father was proud to be a “Namasudra, Kashyap Gotra,”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ According to the Hindu *gotra* or clan system, Kashyap *gotra* is associated with the Brahmins. At the turn of the 20 C, caste insurgencies greatly disrupted the class-caste status-quo. The *Chandals* claimed a more respectable title of “Namasudra” and the Brahmin status, the Chashi Kaibarttas, a prosperous peasant community in West Bengal asserted Mahisya status, and the landowning Rajbangshi families in the northern Bengal called themselves “Bratya Kayastha,” launching a movement to wear the sacred thread (*Bengal Divided* 192). While the high-caste Hindus initially reacted vehemently against these assertions, 1920s onwards the Hindu Mahasabha perceived the Dalit Hindus’ demands in the light of countering the Christian and Muslim proselytization, as well as matching up with the British government’s challenge of a separate political constituency for the “depressed classes” (192). Following this, one finds rife instances of provincial conferences focussing on purification or “shuddhi” of the “polluted” people, which was actually a means of espousing the Dalits within the Hindu fold (203).

implying that the Mandals avoided their previous Brahmin-designated caste insignia of *Chandal*. Born in the early 1950s,⁶⁹ Byapari's family migrated to India (precise date not given) to avoid the impending communal riots that continued in East Pakistan even after the Partition. Byapari remembers the dilemma that his family faced while leaving for the new country. On the one hand, the family felt insecure to stay back as a minority and on the other, it was afraid of severing all ties with the old Muslim friends and entering the Hindu majority nation-state of India. As a refugee youth in India, his days were spent partly on railway stations, partly in the refugee camp, at times in Dandakaranya and the Jadavpur hinterlands, and at other times in different parts of India, where he worked and looked for odd jobs. Byapari's narrative is mainly about these hurdles he faced while growing up in post-Partition India. He himself is the chief protagonist of his autobiographical testimony, although in one section of the narrative, he uses third person voice to describe the experiences of *jibon*, his life. *Jibon* can be seen as the second protagonist in the narrative. Occasionally, the tone of narration in the text verges more on confessing than telling. Thus, particular episodes belong to the genre of confessional literature, where he reveals the darker side of his inner thoughts and feelings.

Adhir Biswas was born in Jessore's Magura district in a barber's family. The spatial-temporal frame of his writing shifts back and forth between memories of the two Bengals. His books *Deshbhager Smriti* and *Allar Jomite Paa* have short impressionistic scenes, which do not meet the rules of traditional literary structure and plot. James Orley's definition of "vignette" or "memoir" is applicable to Biswas' writings: "the sort of narrative that is grown out of personal

⁶⁹ Byapari assumes his year of birth to be 1950 or 1951. Both his parents being unlettered, no initiative could be made to record the exact date (*Itibritte* 24). In the same way, Biswas' date/year of birth remains obscure in his memoirs. He mentions that the lack of age proof initially bars him from getting admission in the schools of Calcutta (*Allar Jomite Paa* 143).

experience but that does not focus on the personal element...” (Ochiai 368-9). As typical of a memoir, Biswas’ works are less formal and less ambitious in terms of encompassing life’s events precisely and comprehensively. They are closer to snapshots that have no time-space unilinearity. Rather than autobiography, which is more about describing events taking place in the external social context, Biswas’ writings dither between social happenings and inner psychic repercussions, bringing up different stages of his life. Narrative voices from childhood, teenage and adulthood interrupt the development of an organized narration. Overlapping of events, abnormality of sequences and sometimes going hazy on topics can be attributed to post-traumatic influences in his writings. As a result, Biswas’ language lacks the sense of finality that is present in Byapari’s writing. Biswas, instead, leaves a space for slipperiness of memory. Like Byapari, at times, he uses his textual medium for confessing some of the “unspeakable experiences” from life. Against a deep-seated symbolic intonation of pain and loss for the deceased mother, the chapters of Biswas’ memoirs *Deshbhager Smriti* and *Allar Jomite Paa* are patchworks of the family’s existence in the village and Biswas’ adolescent years in Calcutta.

The Biswas family permanently moved to India in 1967 – four years before the Liberation War of 1971,⁷⁰ when East Pakistan became Bangladesh. According to official history,⁷¹ as poor immigrants who evacuated long after the Partition because of communal unrest in East Pakistan (1964 riots) and the Indo-Pakistan war (1965), both Biswas and Byapari belong to the category of Dalit refugees, whom the Indian nation-state saw as its worst economic

⁷⁰ The War of 1971 saw large-scale violence, causing displacement of nearly 10 million Bengalis (Abhijit Dasgupta 91). Prior to that, East Bengali refugees kept trickling in at different junctures and backdrops of history – in August 16 1946 “Direct Action” stirred by the Muslim League’s Two-Nation Concept, in 1948 after annexation of the Muslim princely state of Hyderabad, in 1949-50 due to anti-Hindu riots in Khulna and Barisal, in the mid-1950s centring the national language issue and adoption of an Islamic constitution, in 1964 causing a mass exodus after the tension around theft of the holy hair from the Hazrat Bal mosque in Kashmir (Nakatani 83).

⁷¹ For details, see Introduction.

liabilities. Their journeys, as presented in their works, show the formation of dissimilar social mappings in a diversified culture of post-Partition West Bengal. Unlike in Byapari's autobiography, there is, strictly speaking, no protagonist in Biswas' memoirs. Due to the random flashback mode of recounting, there is no "story plot" in Biswas' works as such.

Shelley Feldman recognizes middle-class Bengali Hindu immigrants as the primary articulators of melancholic sentiments of Partition. The narratives they construct take on the shape of a virtual myth, simultaneously celebrating the "unadulterated" East Bengali past and ruing the unsatisfactory West Bengali present. In these elitist Partition fictions and memoirs, the *bhadralok* conceptualization of Partition develops itself in isolation from alternate immigrant understandings. The sentimentalization in most of these works has helped the *bhadralok* immigrants to accumulate immense power in the new socio-political arena. They frequently refer to a particular utopian vision of the countryside East Bengali "home," without addressing the common landlord and peasant relationship, from which sprout the seeds of sectarianism and hatred. Thus, their pervasive stories of "injustice" and "fall" do not incorporate the routine violence the *bhadralok* inflicted on the East Bengali Muslim and Dalit wage-workers and peasants, because such revelations would jeopardize the positive impressions about bucolic East Bengal, which has often been juxtaposed with the "harmful" city life of Calcutta.⁷² It is therefore understandable that Dalit refugees did not participate in the elite migrants' collective literary and cultural performances of nostalgic lamentation. The former's marginalization suggests that there never was a singular refugee experience outside of caste and class grids, as represented by

⁷² The very idea of an eastern wing of Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh, disrupts the sentimentalized musings about East Bengal village life, as it insinuates a change in time-immemorial hierarchy of the Hindu *zamindars* over the Muslim peasants. Pakistan for the Bengali *babus* ushered in a new scenario viz-a-viz social inter-relationship, where peasants were rendered an unforeseen economy and sense of identity, through dismantling of the older power structure (Samir Kumar Das 116).

middle-class Bengali immigrants. The traditionalist hierarchical arrangements in the refugee camps and refugee colonies⁷³ also help to disprove this assertion of unified identity. In light of these facts, Dalit immigrant writings problematize the politics that inspire East Bengali *bhadralok* migrants' calculated and affective sentiments in literature, and question the latter's self-declared "marginal" position in post-Partition West Bengal.

Lacking one or all of the pre-given criteria for being considered "refined"—high-caste, economic empowerment, cultural and social capital – but progressively acquiring them under the auspices of post-Partition social dynamics, how do Biswas and Byapari encounter the signification of *bhadralok*? What new notions of "*bhadra*" and "Dalit" are formed in their respective situations, as a result of marriage between the "refined" and the "unrefined" ways of living? In answering these questions, this chapter touches on the *bhadralok-chhotolok* undercurrents in Biswas and Byapari's texts, and examines the difficulty of pinning down their identities completely within any single category, as their economic, social and cultural nuances oppose absolute meanings. I study how their texts offer alternate identity readings of Partition, and in that way, subvert the dominant East Bengali *bhadralok* narratives.

I expect my enquiry to enhance a vital project that has hitherto remained under-researched, at least in the field of literary scholarship. Several social scientists and historians, such as Sekhar Bandopadhyay, Joya Chatterji, Suranjan Das, Mark Juergensmeyer, Ravinder Kaur, Ranabir Samaddar, and Dwaipayan Sen have studied the socio-historical aspects of caste and communal issues pertaining to Partition, in the context of Punjab and Bengal. However, the

⁷³ According to K.N.Sen and L.Sen's case study, although complete lack of social control in the post-Partition camp life had caused strangers from different castes and classes to huddle together, the poor high-castes, upon being forced to live with the Dalits, exuded blatant hierarchical tendencies, especially over shared public spaces and utilities, which often resulted in caste-frictions (Sen and Sen 56-57).

literature on Bengal Partition has yet to make a considerable move from the selective *bhadralok* standpoint. The Partition of India at large, and the Partition of Bengal have not received their respective due consideration in Indian nationalist historiography, and it is the scholars' call to complement the streamlined and amnesiac memory of this history.⁷⁴ Having said that, in the case of Bengal, it is fallacious to see the refugees as a uniformly marginalized group. There have been instances, when a selected section from among the refugees intersected and in effect inhabited

⁷⁴ Several critics on Bengal Partition have assiduously commented on the discrimination meted out by Central government in the treatment of Punjabi and Bengali refugees. For instance, Talbot and Singh state that while India's over-generalized "success story" is flaunted by citing achievements on the Punjab frontier's planned rehabilitation, there seems to be an intended amnesia and gap shrouding the unanswered issues of Bengal experience – what the authors recognize about Nehru's attitude "keen on producing the right publicity about the 'work done on rehabilitation, relief and evacuation'" (Talbot and Singh 92). They point out how Partition has become synonymous to the Punjab province because of the historians' recurrent reference to documentary, oral and fictional sources mainly in Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and English, resulting in a neglect of the contributions from Bengal. In his speech at a Press Conference (New Delhi, March 10, 1949), Sarat Bose mentions that whereas the refugees in the north-western frontier received a non-refundable government aid of 28 crore rupees, in comparison, Bengal received only 5 crore rupees, and that too in the form of credit. Talbot and Singh as well as Ranajit Roy's examination of this problem in greater detail discloses how, in fact, inequity on the part of the Central government was acutely liable for the general class and status gap between the refugees from both parts of India – while many Punjabi refugees improved agriculturally, industrially and commercially in comparison to their former status in West Pakistan, the Bengali refugees, in the process of losing their cultural and socio-economic foothold, contributed towards the countrywide setback of unemployment. Roy reports that although there was a preparation to rehabilitate the Bengali refugees in the Dandakaranya forest in the late 1950s, the project collapsed due to complications caused by the chief administrator in the Ministry of Rehabilitation. The popular perception was fed with myths such as the Bengali refugees were loath to settle in Dandakaranya, whereas in reality the Ministry of Rehabilitation, since March 1961, had cut down the targets from 35,000 to 7,000 families (Roy 56). The Central Government, instead of enhancing the situation of trade and industry in West Bengal, used the province as a supplier of raw materials and semi-manufactured materials as well as a foreign currency purchasing state – all of which led to attenuation of West Bengal's resources for the betterment of other regions (Roy 57). Most of the evacuee Muslims' properties outside of Punjab and Bengal as well as government-sponsored possessions were largely distributed among the immigrants from West Pakistan free of cost (Roy 59). The Central government afterwards declared several loans given to the West Pakistani refugees as compensation, whereas the Bengali refugees did not receive ample loan in the first place. In 1961, the West Bengal government wrote to the Ministry of Rehabilitation in the Centre: "The non-farmer families are arbitrarily being rendered small amounts of trade loans, just in order to lure them away from the refugee camp settlements" (quoted in Roy 63, paraphrased from Bengali). In *The Story of Rehabilitation*, U. Bhaskar Rao affirms that all over India, the Central Government had subsidised the construction of nineteen cities for the West Pakistani refugees, which thrived with prosperous schools, hospitals and commercial enterprises, whereas nothing comparable was set up for the refugees from Bengal. The East Pakistani migrants had not at all benefitted from the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement in terms of recouping or being recompensed for their custody in East Pakistan. As a result, the economy of West Bengal (as well as Tripura and Assam) had undergone an irreparable hold-up, and under extreme burden, there was an overall flagging of the section conventionally designated as the "middle class" (Roy 63).

the centre-stage of Calcuttan culture (see Introduction).⁷⁵ One of the major points missed in these typical *bhadralok* immigrant's accounts is the Dalit refugees' perspective and subjectivity.⁷⁶ Thus, the second generation Dalit evacuee's becoming literate and revisiting the history is an essential exercise in saving the memory of Partition from saturated, conservative tropes. Dalit experiences, as represented in Biswas and Byapari's narratives, interrupt elitist and nostalgic platitudes. Literature produced from Dalit perspectives enriches the understandings of Partition's afterlives. They make the discussions more well-rounded, less unbalanced, and with new vistas of aesthetic and ethical points of view.

Dalit Bengali Refugee: A Social, Political, Religious "Other"

In the foreword of *Allar Jomite Paa (Stepping on the Land of Allah)*, Adhir Biswas suggests how the singular historico-political meaning of Partition can be replaced by countless temporal and spatial journeys. The concept of "Allar Jomin" or "The Land of Allah" has an abstract dimension of voyage that hopes to meet the idyll of heaven. Because of the spirituality

⁷⁵ This is also observable in the case of Punjabi Partition narratives, where the mass produced events in fictions were "voiced, written and publicly discriminated by prominent upper-caste Punjabis" (Anand 2001; Narula 2002; Neville 1998; Tandon 2000; quoted in Kaur, "Narrative Absence" 287). The quintessential refugee is imagined as a masculine individual from the socially respectable castes, whose experiences as told orally, through memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, newspaper reports and public speeches (287), constitute the "authentic" knowledge about Partition. The two key aspects of these mainstream accounts are the sombre descriptions of loss, and the conceited versions of the successful immigrants' establishing their influence with new homes, businesses and powerful lobbies in local Delhi politics (286). Ravinder Kaur asserts: "When repeated frequently and/or authenticated and acknowledged by multiple public authorities like state institutions, community leaders, retired government officials or intellectual authority as represented by the writers, poets and artists who become chroniclers of social and political history in their fictional work, this common minimum narrative takes the shape of a 'master narrative' that seeks to relay the historical 'truth' about a given event" (286).

⁷⁶ Based on her fieldwork on the underclass refugee-infested area of Rehgar Pura, Delhi, Ravinder Kaur concludes that the master narratives of Partition migration history consciously obscure the position of the Dalits. In the theme of modern citizen making in postcolonial India, the "Untouchable" narratives are seen as aberrations. Kaur notes that the government policies of settlement are also tacitly biased towards the upper-castes between 1947 and 1965. In her words: "The narrative absence becomes a gauge of both the discursive and the physical exclusion of 'Untouchable' refugees from the legitimate community of Partition migrants" (Kaur, "Narrative Absence" 281). Thus, in order "to understand the absences and omissions in Partition history," one needs to question the "simplified and complex multi-layered personal experiences that the migrants often recount" (285).

adhered to land, “Allar Jomin” as an idea forgoes the gory events that accompanied Partition. From the outset, the narrative avoids the larger tropes of canonical immigrant memoirs, whose two main ingredients are horrific descriptions of communal violence, and systematic celebration of timeless Hindu-Muslim amity.⁷⁷ Biswas’ “Allar Jomin” is instead an illusory construal of Calcutta, predominantly from a rural and naïve position of a Dalit. It suggests a future-facing vision and hope for resettlement in a distant and foreign metropolitan milieu, particularly as it acquired among the landless immigrants, who had previously had no material contact with Calcutta.⁷⁸ The high optimism associated with Calcutta in Biswas’ writing and how the knowledge of successful absorption within its bounds boosted a village family’s status overnight, can be understood from the instance, where a youth from Magura gets a job in one of the city’s vest factories with a promising wage (*Deshbhager Smriti* 14).

Such idealized perceptions, however, fail to anticipate the myriad of living patterns defining the political and social cartography of Calcutta. In other words, the Dalit labourer’s positive expectations about the Calcuttan way of life and his own inclusion into it is not informed about the complexities of both Calcutta and East Bengal. Just as it would be misleading to generalize the East Bengalis without referring to their class, caste, linguistic or cultural nuances,

⁷⁷ Alok Bhalla notes: “Most of the available histories of the Partition, written either as accounts of victory or as nightmares, are constructed in the form of ‘compelling narratives’ concerned with metaphysical identities of different communities and their collective fate rather than with the everyday selves of people and their acts in profane time. They are teleological histories in which the past is given a ‘retrospective intelligibility’ and rationality. The fact of the partition permits them to arrange a diverse variety of discrete incidents into a successive and logical order so they lead to a known and expected end” (Bhalla 3120). While Bhalla states that the fictional accounts contain more “truthfully remembered,” “capricious” and “contradictory” qualities, where the end may be in crime, ethical mapping or silence, it is also important to note that a significant corpus of the elite refugees’ memorial literature also contribute to reductive readings of the Partition. For discussion on how canonical Partition narratives frequently coincide with the mainstream nationalistic history in terms of “truth claim,” see Chapter 2.

⁷⁸ For the East Bengali poorer rural masses, especially the Dalits, Calcutta had always been synonymous to wish-fulfilment and assumed a larger-than-life connotation, as Biswas retrospects: “India means Calcutta. Howrah Bridge, Museum, Zoo. Double-decker bus. Akashbani Calcutta –“Relaying from the Eden Garden”’s Ajay Basu” (*Allar Jomite Paa* 14, translation mine).

similarly there was no uniform process undertaken by the government to resettle the refugees in West Bengal, especially in Calcutta. For the poorer rural sections, as in case of the aforementioned refugee family who had initially rejoiced booming opportunities within the city, only to afterwards end up living in a murky slum, Calcutta had eventually become a metonym for unfulfilled expectations and broken hearts. Biswas writes, “One day I see so many villages within the city. Village after village. I turn the leaf of time. From village to city, from city to village. From country to country. Crossing the marshes, I try to step on Allah’s own soil, drawing in the fragrance of the air” (*Allar Jomite Paa* foreword, translation mine). In this statement, the conflict between ideal and real becomes apparent. As each refugee, depending on his individual resources, has a different fortune to seek, the pluralistic culture of Calcutta belies any singular available rhetoric about “The Refugee Life.”⁷⁹

Manoranjan Byapari makes a more unambiguous confession about the heterogeneity of refugee identity that prevents the formation of a cohesive East Bengali chronicle. While the *bhadralok* immigrants’ testimonies recurrently focus on how they had been transcribed from a land of plenitude to a land of corruption through Partition,⁸⁰ Byapari’s camp experience, when

⁷⁹ Joya Chatterji also discusses how dissimilar opportunities were created for refugees belonging to different classes – the Hindus in West Bengal and the Muslims in East Bengal – in many cases implying a class-based mutual settlement among Hindu and Muslim evacuees from similar ranks, regarding the exchanging of properties (Chatterji, “Dispositions and Destinations” 283-285).

⁸⁰ The ace authors of Bengal Partition have recurrently talked about the Indian government’s betrayal, and the native West Bengalis’ ill-treatment towards the immigrants. Their works centre on the fall of the middle-class émigrés and their resurgence through sheer talent, courage and hard work. For example, Sunil Ganguly’s *Purbo-Paschim* and *Arjun* are chiefly based on the middle-class *bhadralok* immigrants’ decline of status, upon migrating to a hostile Calcuttan milieu, and the stereotypes of the skilful and honest East Bengalis are etched against the immoral and selfish West Bengalis. In *Arjun*, as the “lower-caste”-born Labonyo cannot rise above her situation and is raped by the colony goons, whereas Arjun, a brilliant student and an upper-caste refugee in the same colony heads for an affair with a rich West Bengali girl, the caste- and gender-based status quo becomes apparent. In Atin Bandopadhyay’s *Neelkontho Pakhir Khonje*, the placid Hindu East Bengali village-life is shown through the trope of a pious upper-caste Hindu family being served by the loyal Muslim *rayat*, until the “conspiring” Muslim politicians demand for a separate Pakistan. Steeped in the Congressite nationalistic ideals, the storyline contains all the stock characters and themes – the poor, backward and lustful Muslim, the vulnerable raped Hindu widow who turns into

compared to his former East Bengali life, is not completely bleak: “Back in East Bengal, the poor lower caste person would not have much opportunity to become literate. Only desiring to learn was not enough. Here such opening is present. A school has been started with the governmental initiative right inside the camp. All the camp children study here” (*Itibritte* 30, translation mine).⁸¹ This comparison of camp life with former life in East Bengal, which puts the latter in negative shades, is not only contradictory but quite disruptive with respect to the utopian imaginings of “homeland” in *bhadralok* immigrant memoirs.

Biswas and Byapari’s writings portray a sceptical standpoint with respect to everyone else in society – the upper-class West and East Bengalis, the Muslim immigrants, as well as other Dalit Hindu refugees, with whom they, as Dalit refugees, competed for land, relief and jobs. In

a seductress, the Westernized and precocious Calcutta-bred children as opposed to the simple East Bengali rural boy, and the Muslim peasant girl’s unrequited love for this Hindu boy – all of which define the narrative voice by its East Bengali *bhadralok*-ness. In the same way, Qurratulain Hyder’s *Fireflies in the Mist* depicts the communist terrorist groups of Bengal as highly elite and patriarchal coteries, which hold out memberships to the educated middle-class women, but locate them at the fringes of the revolution, using them only as pawns. As the most heretical of the females commit suicide, whereas others become either vain *bhadramahila* or unfortunate victims of men’s disloyalty, the setting of the plot is very aristocratic and thereby conservative. Among the short stories, Ramapada Chowdhury’s “Embrace” (“Angapali”) and “The Stricken Daughter” (“Karun Kanya”), and Narendra Mitra’s “Illegitimate” (“Jaiba”) are preoccupied with middle-class notions of “pure” and “impure,” dealing with the questions of legitimate and illegitimate, as well as the abducted women’s rehabilitation and problematic re-allocation within the family. In my subsequent chapters, I argue that despite focusing on the avant-garde filmic techniques to criticize the current cinema and the decrepit Calcuttan mode of life, or asserting a feminist position from the stance of a rape victim, both Ritwik Ghatak and Jyotirmoyee Devi betray bourgeois ideologies that fail to achieve the goals of modernity. In all these canonical works on the Partition of Bengal, the narrative voice emerges from an upper-caste, educated, middle-class Hindu standpoint, which cannot articulate the sensibilities of Dalit, non-*bhadra* Partition victims.

⁸¹ In another place, Byapari evinces the nuanced and mutually internecine relationship among the different stratas of East Bengalis, a fact that the assimilationist *bhadralok* immigrant writings have always swept under the carpet: “The *bhadralok*, based on their hackneyed caste-superiority, refrained from co-existing with the *Namo Podo* fishermen ironsmith artisan weaver cobbler and the like. Hence they had resisted registering their names and leading a dole-dependent camp life. Taking consent and assistance from the upper-caste government kin, the *bhadralok* developed about one hundred and fifty squatter colonies in Calcutta and its outskirts in succession, and were thereby capable of becoming self-sufficient. Partly through education, partly by exploiting the political connections, and partly owing to innate shrewdness and fraudulent characteristics that marked the upper-castes, they did not have to face any crisis in running their households. They were quite happy *and the truth is many amongst them had not enjoyed so much privilege even in East Bengal*” (*Itibritte* 31, emphasis and translation mine).

Byapari's words: "The caste is intrinsic within class, and the class within caste. If one group dismisses me for being an "Untouchable," another looks down on me for being a poor illiterate *rickshaw*-puller. For both the parties I am an equally taboo company" (*Itibritte* 363, translation mine). Biswas' experience of alienation begins at a very early stage of his refugee life in the slum neighbourhood. His betrayal by the class of brokers happens through his encounter with another East Bengali poor refugee called Madhab. Biswas' brother had relocated Madhab's family from Faridpur to Calcutta's Motijheel slum, whereas Madhab in return sells a derelict swamp land to the Biswas family at an inexorably high rate. Despite being a fellow acquaintance from East Bengal, Madhab, as a broker, exploits the Biswas family's nostalgia for their abandoned village⁸²: "...Dignagar is just like our Magura. It emanates a feeling of having crossed the town and entered a village – you would feel as if one of the parishes from the district of Jessore has been overlaid to that locality" ("Allar Jomite Paa" 17, translation mine). Such fraudulent acts, originating both from among the natives as well as the poorer immigrants, mushroomed all over West Bengal in post-Partition times, as people sold counterfeit properties to vulnerable new settlers.⁸³ For the narrator's family, deception at such a close-knit level leads to a breakdown of their mental perception about a shared collective refugee identity.

⁸² Anasua Basu Raychaudhury notes that the Bengali refugees usually strived to maintain a caricature of their distant *desh* or homeland, in the process of erecting new *para* (locality) in the immigrated land of West Bengal (Basu Raychaudhury, "Nostalgia of 'Desh'" 5653).

⁸³ Profulla Roychoudhury notes that the post-Partition new generation in West Bengal had mostly become dissolute through the impact of famine and the Second World War, and witnessed lofty ideas and old values being misutilized for acquisition of power, as in the case of vote-catching. New social laws justified getting hold of money without commanding respect, such that people who chose questionable means of earning were not only not looked down upon, but had access to all social privileges in the society. In the final days of communal riots prior to the Partition, Bengal had witnessed change in the definition of *goondas* (antisocial thugs), whose alliance with the rich made them socially acceptable, even respectable and men of great influence. As they offered protection of lives, properties and localities, they turned from socially boycotted to important elements, who determined the course of socio-political developments in West Bengal. *Mastans*, on the other hand, were offshoots of the *bhadralok* educated middle-class families. Roychoudhury states: "It is not perhaps too much to say that the ways

Despite hailing from the same background and sharing a similar economic position, Partition and subsequent relocation into city life generated a different kind of social dialogue between the brokers and the Biswas family, similar to that between an exploiter and an exploited. While the brokers showed a greater enthusiasm for making quick money than leading an honest and respectable life, the Biswas family, though located among so-called “*chhotolok*” masses in slum conditions, tried to imitate the moral codes of the gentleman class. Their circumstances echo with Swapna Banerjee’s understanding of the lowest rung of poor *bhadraloks*, “who aspired to have the same life-style as the upper two groups” (685). Their desire to relive East Bengal’s rural ambiance in Calcutta did not deter them from aspiring the “dignified” lifestyle of a *bhadralok*. For such poor but *bhadra* refugees such as the Biswas family, settling for tougher conditions of living was thus considered more suitable than earning dishonestly like the brokers.⁸⁴

In this regard, Manoranjan Byapari’s journey is counterposed to that of Biswas. Initially trying to integrate himself with the *bhadralok* prescripts by attempting to get literate through

of the new-rich were the ways of the *goondas*” (Roychoudhury 31). The lack of job availability pushed youths into crime, hooliganism, corruption. For more, see Roychoudhury’s *Left experiment in West Bengal*.

⁸⁴ Especially in their desire for education, the Biswas and the Byapari family metaphorically reproduce the pattern of privileged groups, who Banerjee defines as the *abhijat* (aristocratic) and the *grihastha* (middle-class) or the *madhyabitto sreni* (middling class): “The self-image of the *bhadralok* as member of a new political class was not primarily associated with capitalist endeavours but shaped by the aspiration to be a member of the “educated middle-class” — *madhyabitto* or *sikkhita sampraday* who distinguished themselves both from the pre-existing aristocracy of *dewans* (financial ministers or accountants) and *banians* (tradesmen) who were at the apex of the early colonial society and from the toiling masses from towns and countryside who tended to be lower castes or Muslims” (Swapna Banerjee 685). For such refugee inhabitants who precariously tried to place themselves at the ideological margins of *bhadralokdom*, even as supplementary familial expenditures such as a dress during the festive season or an occasional largesse of fine rice and meat symbolized coming closer to the mainstream practices, missing a traction on moral grounds like accepting other’s favours, travelling without tickets and telling lies unforgivably relapsed them to the rank of the *chhotolok*. In repeated episodes where Byapari recounts how the *bhadralok* populace take his father, brother or him as offenders merely under unfounded suspicion, the effort on the part of the well-established Calcuttan *babus* at underlining spatial and social gaps with these underdogs becomes clear, which aims to terminate any possible second/alternate *bhadralok*’s formation.

camp schooling, but later losing the material means and physical health to last in the upper-class-bred competition, Byapari challenges the very divisive line that allots permanent tags of “*chhotolok*” and “*bhadralok*.” His narrative and Self continuously contend with the assumed criteria of the two aforesaid social markers. Unlike Biswas, therefore, his journey is not fraught with guilt – a psychic product developed out of emulating the “refined” – but filled with indignation. The basic claims for hunger, clothing and shelter being irrepressibly forceful in his case, and the pathway of meeting these needs being pinned with bitter experiences with the *bhadralok*, Byapari’s writing opens up *chhotolok*-ness in a confident and positive light. A *rickshaw*-puller and an activist-turned-writer, Byapari questions the naturalized value systems that delimit the aesthetic and ethical brackets of each class. By not willing to rephrase his refugee-ness in line with prefixed and totalized tales about “Golden East Bengal,” he avoids the pre-constructed bourgeois tropes, rescuing his personal accounts from being suppressed by upper-caste immigrant narratives.

Biswas recounts about the impasse of the Dalit refugees who are a uniquely deprived people, as they cannot be foisted even among the class of beggars. Their ostracized condition in the slums of Calcutta is realized, as they are seen as trespassers claiming shares in the rights of native working class population. So the “lower-class” here is starkly branched off in terms of natives and immigrants. In a particular incident where the narrator and his father stand in a row of poor people for food relief conducted by the missionaries, a leprosy patient points them out as “new people,” causing them to be moved out of the line. Dalit refugees, inhabiting the slum space, are thus not considered as primary claimants of aid provided by the missionary

organizations, because their emergency is not as immediately visible as that of a leprosy patient.⁸⁵

The vulnerability of the Biswas and the Byapari families is also revealed in their moving from one political or religious identity to another. For Dalits of Bengal, no political or religious outlook outlasted their pragmatic material want. The lack of affiliation with a particular group, religion and political ideology among Dalits in the camps and slums shows the betrayal of their aspirations by each dominant group at some point, as such groups had not been able to sustain Dalit support beyond the urgent realization of their own agenda. For example, staunch adherence to inherited Hindu faith is an extravagance meant chiefly for the *bhadralok* immigrants, which could not always be enjoyed by Dalits. Biswas writes about his first familiarity with “India” at the Sealdah station: “The blue-white dressed sisters come to the station platform. They beckon with their hands. We run towards them saying “Salutes to Jesus!” From their wooden-handled bags come out fruits, breads, lozenges. We again sing the same tune “Salutes to Jesus!”” (*Deshbhager Smriti* 34, translation mine). Similar to the above experience, for an illiterate rustic barber like Biswas’ father, who had perhaps never directly been in touch with any political group except through localized practices,⁸⁶ uttering “Vande Mataram” is a void performance and mock-enactment of patriotism, which concentrates around the need of a winter garment or a shirt. At different stages of his life, Byapari too finds himself inadequate in terms of becoming the actor

⁸⁵ This is an indirect criticism of the limitations in the service of non-governmental missionaries, whose acts of charity were, in most cases, agenda-driven. In the above case, the volunteers who were serving leprosy-affected or otherwise disabled poor people, would not include a poor refugee, because s/he does not fulfill the criterion of a special physical condition.

⁸⁶ Sekhar Bandopadhyay observes that the lower castes in Bengal were strategically isolated from the nationalist politics till the late 1930s decade, and the council and constitutional reforms largely remained a stronghold of the elite organizers. The Dalit populace’s socio-economic demands were forwarded, to an extent, by the Dalit caste leaders, and those at the bottom rung had no other option than to follow up these protests, due to absence of any class-based ideology propelling formation of an alternate group (Bandopadhyay, “A Peasant Caste in Protest” 148).

of the core socialist revolution, even as he adopts the political principles of the Naxalites, the Communists, and later gets involved in the labour union of Shankar Guha Niyogi's Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha. Consequently, his writings reveal the shortcomings in all these ideologies.⁸⁷

Fractured Family as a Metaphor of Fractured Self

Both Byapari and Biswas note that against a reality of privation, material excess of city-life and corresponding ideas of what could be achieved in an urban setting, enticed Dalit refugees into dishonesty and corruption. Their testimonials capture the process of what they suggest as the dissipation of Dalit morality, while adjusting with their new urban lifestyles. Byapari describes how his teenage ventures to Darjeeling, Assam and Lucknow, with the expectation of economic prosperity, are repaid with deception, sexual abuse and exploitation of labour for free. Going on a round to clean garden weeds in distant localities, Biswas remembers working in exchange for trifling sum of money or titbits (*Allar Jomite Paa* 103). He would linger outside houses that played gramophone records or near stadia to listen to eminent artists' performances, about whom he had learnt upon coming to Calcutta (*Allar Jomite Paa* 87). Apart from the material losses that middle-class memory laments in personal and official discourses, Biswas' chapter "Prothom Mithye" ("First Lie" in *Allar Jomite Paa*) brings out the emotional response of a child towards the damage that Partition inflicts on his family. This episode shows the dissolution of a Dalit patriarch's control over his children. Partition literature has ample scope to reasonably criticize

⁸⁷ The Naxalite movement, which broke off from the orthodox wing of the Communist Party, was initiated mainly by middle-class Bengali educated youth, where small fry like Byapari were used as pawns, and they faced the maximum torture of the police even when bigger leaders managed to flee. The orthodox communist wing, which formed government, in fact exploited these underdogs before betraying them (see Marichjhanpi incident in Introduction). In case of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Byapari relates how the party's Gandhian moderationist attitude could at times be reckoned as irrelevant, given the extent of injustice that the state meted out to the tribal people. He also confesses that between the Morcha's red flag for labours and green flag for peasants, he, a Dalit refugee working as a party handyman, could associate with neither (*Itibritte* 260). As I elaborate in the subsequent section on education, afterwards, his rising to a *bhadralok* writer's status and material compulsion of family life detours him from the idealist path.

the patriarchal nature of nationalist historiography, which actively breeds communal discourses and provides marginal status to women, particularly female victims. However, in this case, Biswas' father as a poor Dalit patriarch, who is reduced to insolvency and is located at the bottom rung of social order, cannot be equated with the key actors of national movements and the Partition. His sense of self-weight is solely balanced on his ability to elicit obedience from his own children. In that regard, Partition remains responsible for breaking him from a self-sufficient parent into a penniless covetous "*chhotolok*."

Byapari's testimony similarly contradicts the pervasive picture of the powerful, hypersexual, violent male, who is the stock protagonist of the Partition discourse. He remembers his father walking back home from a refugee rally with a fractured head, after being manhandled by the police.⁸⁸ Further, when a constable rapes him, Byapari's sensibilities as a Dalit minor male cannot be merged with the socially recognized signs of "Masculinity:"

Weighing around eighty to eighty five kilos, being more the six feet tall, having the build of a trained wrestler, who is back and forth protected by the legal system of the extremely powerful Indian state...on the other hand, is the inherently marginalized poor weak teenager. How can he dare to breach the national and the social panoplies, reach the wrongdoer and bestow him with an apposite punishment? (*Itibritte* 103, translation mine)

In this sexual penetration of the Dalit refugee youth by the State guardian who is physically bigger, commands state power and enjoys socio-economic strength, the former's gender is complicated by caste and class subjugation. That both Biswas and Byapari are forced to act as mediums of erotic pleasure in exchange for food by men of higher authority, suggests that their victimization cannot be categorized under a single expression of violence. As Byapari observes,

⁸⁸ About his father, Byapari states: "He did not know that his strong hands would become idle one day. Being ousted from his ancestral land, he would have to extend them before the time, the society and the inhuman people, begging for a work, a living, a country, an identity" ("Ananta Ratir Chandal" 208).

forcing a Dalit into prostitution also has the connotation of decadence, which reinforces the bourgeois value-judgment about their “unrefined” caste origin. In this way, caste subordination further impairs their abandoned status as refugees. The rapes of these Dalit males by powerful men expose their insecurity in the charter of law, in addition to their rejection from the Hindu communal paradigm. By creating a gargantuan structure of need, Partition denudes their sense of self-worth and turns them into sycophantic beggars and flesh-traders.⁸⁹ As Dalit male refugees, sexual abuses to which they are subjected have not been vocalized and registered in the way middle-class or even Dalit female refugees’ abduction and violation have been. The representation of their experiences therefore complicates the conventional link that scholars make between masculine rivalries like wars and sexual violence on women’s bodies. Instead, their experiences highlight that social disruptions like war are not only occasions for assaulting the female, but all sorts of social Other – Dalit males, minority communities, poors and non-adults. In fact, Biswas’ habitual molestation by an adult male in his village even prior to the migration points out that such exploitation is part of the “normal everyday” in a Dalit’s life.

The childhood of the Dalit narrators expose new meanings of disease and shame. For example, from his experience of camp life, Byapari grows up learning to recognize his own mother and sister as voluptuous bodies in scanty clothes ravished by the outsider’s gaze. Both Biswas and Byapari witness their fathers’ steady mental and physical decline. Byapari explains his father’s testiness and hatred as follows: “My father is handing me what society has handed to him” (*Itibritte* 110). On the other hand, in “Amar Baba” (“My Father” in *Deshbhager Smriti*),

⁸⁹ The post-Partition plight of the Dalits who had previously been petty labours and peasants, but had recently been turned into vagrant alm-seekers, draws on Benjamin’s definition of disgraceful poverty: “When there was work that fed the man, there was also poverty that did not disgrace him, if it arose from deformity or other misfortune. But this deprivation, into which millions are born and hundreds of thousands are dragged by impoverishment, does indeed disgrace” (*One-Way Street* 56).

Biswas' father's walking with a stick to faraway localities in secret hope of receiving alms seems inconsistent with his son's formal school education and increasing social mobility. In the incident where Biswas' father takes him to a queue of relief service organized by the Congress volunteers, the agonizing surprise and recognition of disgrace is profound in the narrator's child psyche. In his eye, his father is reduced to a weak and reprehensible man, forever exposed to the rebukes of his elder brothers. Biswas' father's vulnerability also shows in his persistent uneasiness at the thought of being recognized by one of the relief volunteers, who happens to be his elder son's friend. There is, thus, an ongoing sporadic marriage and dissociation between the idea of "self-respect" and the Dalit identity. Moreover, because Biswas' brother Kalidas works in a corporation factory, and the family prestige associated with his name, it is a matter of shame to discover the father in the plight of scavenging. The economically stable sons contest the old patriarch's power in the family who has sold his East Pakistan home and, in the process of moving to the new country, has been dispossessed of all his resources. In "Beej" ("Seed" in *Deshbhager Smriti*), Biswas confesses from his hindsight that he was reluctant to publicly acknowledge his relationship with his own father, after he saw the latter getting away without bus-tickets and spotted him begging in front of the Campbell hospital. The new generation of educated Dalit refugee thus develops an identity in isolation from his/her non-*bhadralok* predecessors. This difference shows in the form of body marks, as Biswas' father tattoos his own initials on the hand for the fear of sinking in the crowds. His feeling represents the older generation Dalit refugee's unwelcome position and identity crisis in Calcutta. About his father, Biswas writes: "Still my father looked like a cast-out person" (*Deshbhager Smriti* 39, translation mine). Partition had diminished the older generations of Dalits into infantile characters outside of politics and religion. While Biswas also faces fragmentation of his identity, as a refugee youth,

he, unlike his father, at least has the advantage of preparing himself in accordance with the demands of city life and making new associations within it.

The disrupted idea of “family” for the economically broke Dalit refugees emerges with the picture of a home gone astray:

My younger brother works in a house as a security guard. It is a whole day’s duty. My middle brother has left the locality to take part in party politics. I have heard that he lives somewhere in Kamardanga or Padmapukur’s tannery. Father does not ask for his whereabouts. It is in my brother’s interest not to meet him (*Deshbhager Smriti* 45-46, translation mine).

Biswas writes how most of the East Bengali domestic units suffered from a loss of the traditional essence of family, either because of overcrowded accommodations or due to fission beyond the chance of reunion: “There are people, but no family. Some are in Behala, some in Shyamnagar, others in Bongaon. Then another is missing...a few years back, the Ichhamoti flood had divested several families of their houses, yet I don’t know any whose household has been ruined as much as these people’s homes” (*Deshbhager Smriti* 16-17, translation mine). The irreparable gaps within the family are also captured in the child narrator’s unending wait for his family members to come and see him during the hospital visiting hours, which never happens.

In a post-Partition notion of a refugee home, the younger family members would frequently strive for *bhadralok* ideal, whereas the older generations often disposed themselves to general welfare. Consequently, a uniform class and cultural alignment, which is traditionally the characteristic of a *bhadra* family, was deeply shaken. This incongruence within a single family is another major trend evaded by the *bhadralok* immigrants’ popular discourses. The image of the industrious and highly endowed East Bengali *bhadralok* is perpetuated at the cost of eliminating their other *bhadra* consociates, who could not make it big after coming to West Bengal. Having said that, it is important to note that the floating Dalit population has been more severely

imperilled by familial disintegration than the *bhadralok*, as the former could not express their own choice in the matter of rehabilitation. Dalits could not simulate the compact and exemplary patterns of *bhadralok* housings,⁹⁰ as both the Central and the West Bengal State government's common aim was to disperse these "lesser" people to different parts of India outside West Bengal (see Introduction). For these people, the Calcuttan air is internalized through learning new jargon, one of the foremost being to call one's home as "basha," the temporary lodging, instead of "bari," which stands for a kind of stability.

In the narratives, the growing inter-generational gaps among Dalit refugees reflect their increasing distantiation from their East Bengali roots and thereby loss of their distinguished "*bangal*" (East Bengali) Selfhood, by complying with the Calcutta-centric mores of existence.⁹¹ In the steady rifts separating three generations of the Biswas family lies a forced process of forgetting the past in the urge to merge with the Calcuttan *bhadralok*-dom, away from the subaltern identity. Gaim Kibreab notes that the refugee groups that bond well with the national bureaucrats in economic and political terms, are the ones more prone to "resort to traditional ethnic social security functions," and by that means retain "their areas of origin" (338-339).

⁹⁰ Among such model refugee housings was the Manohar colony, which reconstructed refugee homes on a cooperative basis, including the organized methods of allotting plots and hutment-making, under the supervision of a central committee (*Statesman* 3 April 1950). The Madhyamgram's enterprise was, in fact, thought to have the "chances of developing into a prosperous suburban town" (*Statesman* 18 May 1950, quoted in Kudaisya 30).

⁹¹ According to Romola Sanyal's study, forgetting of one's East Bengali distinctive identity could imply different meanings for the different class of refugees. For the post-1971 Dalit immigrants, who hardly had much socio-economic resource, not asserting their uniqueness was a sign of lying low in the margins, for fear of deportment (Sanyal 83). Nonetheless, for the middle-class refugee families or colonies that could successfully fuse with the urban fabric, the former identity was intentionally pushed to the background. In most such cases, the next generation born in West Bengal would be completely oblivious about the insinuations of their "refugee" status (82). Both Sanyal and Ravinder Kaur agree that the nature of "self-rehabilitation" among upper-caste refugees involved a combination of self-help along with constant forgetting of the past, once a goal was accomplished. Kaur notes that the same refugee card had a dual significance for refugees from different stratas – while it signified an uncomfortable remembrance of an inglorious past to the successfully settled refugees, it meant continuance of facilities and assistance for the dependent lot. The card was at the same time a symbol of helplessness, discrimination, challenge to one's aristocracy as well as resourcefulness (Kaur 443).

From this, one can conclude that the “genuine” “*bangal*” traits could be maintained only by the wealthiest and the most privileged immigrants, who also had the power to assert their materially and culturally rich past. While the middle-class squatters would hesitate between adjusting to the West Bengali culture and recalling a patriotic or otherwise decent history, for Dalits like Biswas, survival and success necessitated erasure of the unique rural “*bangal*” lifestyles, at least at the public interfaces. Their lack of confidence proves their lack of strong claim to any religious, social or political licence. Thus, in the particular gesture of Biswas’ father touching a Congress volunteer’s feet who is younger than his son, and addressing him by the honorific designation of “*dada*,” there is a suggestion that the former’s economic and caste handicap has invalidated his right to dignity as an elderly civilian. To have to behave obsequiously before an unknown young man, just because he is the Congress Party’s chancellor who had given a job to Biswas’ brother, is the level of self-compromise that defined the Dalit refugees in West Bengal.

Byapari describes the acute poverty among the Dalits in the East Bengal village where he was born, with the caste Hindus mostly having left for India. He recounts the unkindness of the Hindus, who had deserted his grandfather’s brother in a cholera-stricken state, and later socially boycotted him, thereby pushing him to convert to Islam because he had received services from a Muslim family. After Partition, these Dalits are pitched into the lowest rank of West Bengal society. The ever-changing nature of Self and Other becomes manifest in Byapari’s experience of working as a servant in a rich East Bengali doctor’s home. While the doctor’s family would usually treat him as an “Untouchable” and make him slave in exchange for food, they would suitably espouse him within the Hindu identification, when required to establish their own distinct religious identity against the Muslim neighbours. Byapari describes how a Dalit refugee’s toil was considered saleable to the labour-demanding elites in Calcutta, in the same

way as cattle are showcased in a marketplace (*Itibritte* 110), which associates the former's body exclusively with the system of labour and production.

Polemics around the Issue of Space

While discussing the process of rehabilitation, Byapari underlines the import of space and its distance from the city. Compared to the relatives who could settle near Calcutta and were thus in a more advantaged situation, his own family faced financial deadlock in a remote camp of Bishnupur. For example, the former would go to Jadavpur and sell manual labour, raw products and hand-made goods, whereas in distantly located camps like Shiromanipur, the Block Development Officer (B.D.O.) would not even address complaints as basic as scarcity of drinking water.⁹² Byapari criticizes the caste-tagged nature of land distribution policies, which offered substantial support only to the bourgeois section from East Bengal.⁹³ According to his writing, not only had the *bhadralok* immigrants used their economic and social might to forcefully conquer and legalize colonies and sanction respectable jobs in their own names, but of the 149 colonies thus formed, not a single one would accommodate any poor Dalit refugee from

⁹² Citing the case of the Somalia camps, Kibreab understands that the "dependency syndrome" that is universally ascribed to the refugee mentality originates not so much from professed indolence among the aid-seekers, as from the attitude of the aid-provider: "The assumption that the refugees were unable to take initiatives and to plan for the future meant that bureaucrats and aid agencies' staff designed, planned and implemented health care, water, education and other projects for them – not *with* the community structures. Not surprisingly, because the programmes did not express their felt needs, the refugees failed to respond to the projects; the aid bureaucrats oversimplified this outcome by attributing the lack of response to what was conveniently referred to as 'dependency syndrome'" ("The Myth of Dependency" 334). For instance, compared to the water installation program, which the Somalia refugees saw as an external enterprise to be maintained by Oxfam or UNHCR, the agro-based developments, directly involving the refugees in planning and management of the farming, proved to be relatively more successful (Mister 198, quoted in Kibreab 17). Similar productive return out of rehabilitation schemes is observable among the Punjabi refugees in India, but fails in case of the Bengali Dalits, partly due to political insensitivity, and partly because they were repatriated in lands that were unyielding to agricultural input.

⁹³ Unlike the conveniently placed *bhadralok* settlers of the Salt Lake township or Jadavpur and Bijoygorh colonies, who easily availed the urban academic and employment facilities, Dalit refugees like Byapari and Biswas had to travel a greater journey from the remote suburban areas to the heart of the metropolis.

the *Namo*, *Podo*, *Malo* or *Muchi* groups.⁹⁴ In addition, these *bhadra* squatters were comforted by luminaries like Triguna Sen, Samar Mukherjee, Sarojini Naidu, and even Nehru (*Itibritte* 42).

Ironically, the mainstream *bhadralok* refugee memory overemphasizes the government and the native West Bengalis' hostility towards the East Bengali Other, but conveniently wipes out how their colonies materialized with the help of political leaders, and at the cost of depriving the Dalit refugees. Because the camp-dwelling people had no affiliated leaders in the mainstream political parties for up to a significant phase after Partition, was it not deemed viable to fulfil their needs.

Byapari's states:

The Bengal that had space available for *bhadralok* refugees, where lakhs of people entered from other regions every year and got put up, where lakhs of acres of demesne were under the government's hold, could not dole out one *katha* of land to these people even then, even now... In August 11 1958, the U.C.R.C., a collaborated organization formed by the Communist Party and the Forward Bloc, had petitioned before Chief Minister Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray to develop 62.5 square mile areas of the Sunderban lands and rehabilitate 6,875 refugee families there, as well as re-establish jobs for 3,300 families based on the fish *bheris* in 12,000 acres of lands. At a later stage, the Chief Minister himself had asserted that the government had about 5000 *bighas* of land in Marichjhanpi under the Sandeshkhali police station. But those lands could not be entitled to these people, because they were not the Chatterjee-Mukherjee-Banerjees, or the Ghosh-Bose-Guha-Mitras, towards whom the leaders were ever sympathetic; these were the Biswas-Byapari-Mandal-Bala-Mistris. Dalits, *chhotoloks* ("Ananta Ratir Chandal" 214, 216, translation mine).

Comparing the poor Dalit refugees who resettled in inferior conditions in West Bengal to those who stayed back in Andaman, Byapari observes that if the former could evade the communists' winning promises and move outside of Bengal, they would live in far better-off conditions today

⁹⁴ Byapari remarks: "In those tumultuous moments, they (the upper-castes) would very shrewdly occupy plots in more than one colony. This unfair incursion frequently led to fights among the members of the colonies. Many of these squabbles have been falsely marked as attacks by the *zamindar's* goons. When the situation calmed down after a few years, they would keep one plot for themselves and sell off the rest of them" (*Itibritte* 32, translation mine).

(*Itibritte* 33).⁹⁵ Such a revelation challenges the well-known Leftist criticism of Federal and Provincial governments' initiative in relocating the refugees to Andaman.

While the Leftist opposition politics had earlier backed legalisation of squatter colonies for *bhadralok* immigrants with full enthusiasm, in the subsequent stages, they posed a guarded attitude towards land reform projects, such as realized in case of Jyoti Basu's Communist ministry in West Bengal (1977-2000).⁹⁶ As Utsa Patnaik points out:

Jyoti Basu was acutely conscious that whatever had been achieved was only implementation of the democratic tasks of the bourgeoisie, which the latter itself was no longer capable of implementing, and very far from any completely egalitarian radical land redistribution which is part of the socialist agenda. He

⁹⁵ The Communist Party's exploitative attitude towards the Dalit immigrants in this case very closely resembles the Government of Somalia's strategies towards its refugees: "[T]he government of Somalia saw refugees as a very useful political tool that can be used to maintain a pressure on the international community supporting Somalia's claim to the Ogaden and to bring aid in both food and finance to the country. The spin-offs, misappropriation, corruption etc., all ensure that it is not only the refugees that benefit from the assistance (Mister 1982:4, quoted in Kibreab 324)." Both in Somalia and Bengal, the face-value of humanitarianism is encashed to meet larger political goals, and financial investment made for the grassroots people with the hope of reaping benefits in terms of manpower, political support and influence. Behind the scheme of emboldening the Bengali refugees to resettle in West Bengal, albeit in poor conditions, rather than move to the far-off lands of Andaman and Dandakaranya, lay the political cue of maintaining the altruistic Communist factor through not letting "the refugee problem" subside. In a way, both the Congress government's impassive status quo followed by the Communists' emerging to power were set in motion by assisting but not totally exterminating the core glitches viz-a-viz the Dalit refugees' resettlement, merging the latter's image with the universal underdog refugee stereotypes as labelled by "dependency syndrome," "welfare mentality," "refugee mentality" ...camp life as the "cause of false expectations, inertia and lack of initiative" (Stein 1982; ICVA/UNHCR 1985, quoted in Kibreab 323)" ... "the lack of capability to function independently and to take initiatives in order to attain short and long-term self-sufficiency even in the presence of enabling interventions or when the opportunity to earn an income exists" (330).

⁹⁶ S. Gurumurthy's statistical record of the Jyoti Basu-led government between 1977 and 1982 better helps to explain the reason behind this paradox in the communist regime: "...there were even more Brahmins than in the Congress governments, over 35%; the number of Kayasthas (31%) and Vaishyas (23%) was almost the same as in Congress governments." The Dalit representation in Basu's ministry being 1.5% "...there was not a single Scheduled Caste member of the Council of Ministers, despite West Bengal having the highest concentration of Scheduled Caste population in the whole country – almost 24%" (Gurumurthy 1991, n.p). Gurumurthy evinces that the media and the Marxist leaders together helped to sustain the *bhadralok*'s ascendancy in Bengal. Marxist control had resisted for almost half a century the full-fledged participation of Dalit representatives in political decision-making bodies. Jyoti Basu has been shown to successfully win the rural Bengal for the CPI (M) by securing lands for the lower-castes but reserving the power of the State in the hands of the *bhadralok*. Further, political analyst Yogendra Yadav puts it: "Nandigram did not surprise me...In West Bengal, the proportion of upper castes increased in the state assembly after the Left Front came to power. A coincidence? Not if you calculate the caste composition of the successive Left Front ministries: About two-third of the ministers came from the top three *jatis* (Brahmans, Boddhis, Kayasthas)" (*Indian Express*, March 20, 2007, quoted in Gurumurthy n.p.).

repeatedly pointed out that Bengal has to function within a legal system *which safeguarded private property* and a federal structure which restricted the measures which could be taken, that it was '*not the republic West Bengal*' (58, emphasis mine).

Byapari notes that whereas all the refugees had left their ancestral land for the same cause, the government extended its favouritism only to a selected populace from the upper-castes, and promptly gave them much valuable lands in Calcutta for free. Alternatively, Dalit refugees were meted out with brutal killings, rapes, incendiary and pilfering, when they tried to settle in the remote and low-priced lands of Marichjhanpi in the Sunderban marshlands (*Itibritte* 42).

In further discussing caste politics and space, Byapari mentions how the *bhadralok* immigrants, who presently formed the brand of service-class, had developed the fashionable habit of maintaining house-maids to highlight their social status, and had opened doors for domestic-work to Dalit and Muslim refugees. Many Dalits used this social opening to make an entrée into the *bhadra* sector by dint of their monetary power, and thereby attempted to become Dalit *bhadralok*. However, the Dalits working as domestics and the ones buying housing plots within *bhadralok* colonies cannot be conflated into a single identity, without recognition of their distinct class locations. While there were cases indicating actual thawing of caste rigidity, as is understood from the fact that while selling lands, *babus* preferred the highest bidder irrespective of his caste, there were still occasions when rich Dalit refugees bought lands in the middle-class colonies under false names and were ousted upon the first exposure of their true identity.

Biswas describes the crisis for the 1971 East Pakistan-deportees in finding even petty slum accommodations within Calcutta, as it was not definite whether these Dalit refugees would permanently stay back in West Bengal, or go back to Bangladesh. The native landlords, at their worst, declined leasing out temporary housings, thinking these tenants might escape without paying rents, and at their best, cynically made them pay weekly charges (*Deshbhager Smriti* 37).

Having missed out on getting a border slip, Biswas' father was prohibited the licence for making a small shop in West Bengal (*Deshbhager Smriti* 31-32). In one instance, the need to grab a lodging space was so pressing for a poor family that the couple prepared to leave behind their dying son in a Calcutta hospital, and head for the Kalyani camp (39-40). In another context, Biswas recounts how frequent frictions for space in their clumsy housing caused tenants to lie down right from the evening, in order to ensure that they had some place to sleep. Situated against such ambiguous spatio-social lines where some Dalits would survive the struggle while others would perish, there were people like Byapari, who wrote revolutionary pieces in Mahasweta Devi's journal,⁹⁷ drove a *rickshaw* and was simultaneously hounded by police and political thugs; or the Biswas family, who shared habitat with slum-dwellers yet whose ethical position merged with the middle-class. These individuals problematized the professed borderline between *bhadralok* and *chhotolok*. Their socio-economic framework told one reality and their cultural inclination another.

However, as the narratives suggest, in comparison to Biswas, Byapari occupies a more borderless space, as marked by railway platforms, trains and correction houses. By "borderlessness," I refer to the body's transcending familial and familiar boundaries, such as formed by bourgeois set-ups of home, neighbourhood, etc., which function through naturalized assumptions of hierarchies. As I discuss in the subsequent sections, despite the state policing in the "borderless" spaces too, by virtue of the body's temporary placement in these aforementioned spaces, the power structure, while formed, can also be constantly played with. A settled civil milieu normally does not allow this freedom. Both physically and metaphorically, these spaces are neither as ideologically sacrosanct as the upper-caste immigrant colonies, nor as

⁹⁷ His first essay was published in Mahasweta Devi's journal 'Bartika.'

stifling as the Dalit refugee slums⁹⁸ where Biswas grew up and which aimed to evolve in the model of elite housings. Such borderless spaces suggest a state of non-nostalgia and total struggle in recognition of one's difference from the elites. Unlike Biswas' domestic space, which is too weighed down both by rural East Bengali and urban *bhadralok* standards, Byapari's spacelessness is much more charged with the scope for post-Partition Dalit immigrant's rise to self-identity.

From Rural Community to Urban Slum

It might seem that slum life in post-Partition Calcutta and the rural life experience for poorer East Bengali refugees cannot be differentiated in economic terms. However, when carefully reviewed, the discrete socio-cultural spirit of the two spaces becomes manifest.⁹⁹ As an after-effect of the feudal social make-up, in which the poor and the rich used to be mutually bound by capital and labour, the rural cosmos appears as one too-big family or too-small society, where no one stands alien. On the other hand, when the rural population is displaced to Calcutta after Partition, the Dalit refugees co-exist with the daily labours and other indigents at the periphery of the city, mostly in slum dwellings. While the economic slip shows through their transition from modest living to leeching on government charity, provoking diatribes from native residents, the socio-cultural slip occurs from constituting a majority in the village to being

⁹⁸ The chapter "Rubia Chikon Ghoti Haata" witnesses Biswas' ignominy as a slum-dwelling refugee in Calcutta, as he is shoved out of a shop and disallowed the common right as a purchaser. In so doing, his little-known slum address is made as palpable as his bodily existence, and the status of slum-dweller tied indelibly to his identity (*Allar Jomite Paa* 149).

⁹⁹ In pre-Partition India, village was symptomatic of a relatively more insulated community. The *bhadralok*, as Joya Chatterji studies, was connected to village by ownership of ancestral land properties (*Bengal Divided*), but because he was principally not a village inhabitant, the city culture imbibed by him would usually not permeate into the rural sphere. Within the space of village, the peasantry householders remained the commonest sight, such that to some extent, as Biswas puts it, an understated facade of poverty, as long as it did not become blatant, could be passed for "rural middle-class," which happened to encompass the village mainstream.

assimilated with the underworld and marginal wage-workers in the city. Such physical contiguity with illegal and proletarian clusters would often trigger common pejorative perceptions about the Dalit rural immigrants.¹⁰⁰ Their scale of comparison was now being determined with respect to the city-bred gentle-folks, who established the standard edicts of performance. As a result, the simplistic identifier of *chhotolok* mainly came up to define the alien ghetto of Dalit immigrants, as an attempt to brand them in terms of qualities of non-Self-ness.

In “Khali Paa, Alta-Paa” (“Bare Feet, *Alta*-smeared Feet” in *Allar Jomite Paa*), the image of village society that comes to life unveils an existence too plain to contain the Westernized idea of *bhadralok*, yet which nonetheless does not automatically relegate the poor villagers into the common derogatory bracket of *chhotolok*. Having a profession to serve the society on a generational basis, a barber, a peasant or an artisan might have been treated with traditionalist Hindu-invested caste-based taboos and untouchability, but were still considered as

¹⁰⁰ While reflecting about the H.S. Suhrawardy-run ministry’s success of the communal pogrom in 1946, Ashis Nandy outlines the Dalit slum residents in a highly deterministic fashion: “In many ways, he [Suhrawardy] had precipitated the riots, not perhaps because he wanted a bloodbath *but because his constituency was immigrant non-Bengali labourers, the lower middle classes and the lumpen proletariat*. This support base was a potent political force but was *always volatile and uncontrollable, always waiting to be hijacked for violent causes...* while the poor as a class may not be prone to bigotry, urban slums are often the first to embrace compensatory or defensive idea of generic community offered by fanatics and demagogues. The slums are the natural bastions of the people *with broken community ties and nostalgic memories of faith* grounded in such ties. When they develop new loyalties in the cities, *there is a touch of desperation in these loyalties and a different kind of ardour* associated with them. These new loyalties are then systematically endorsed by fearful, prosperous members of the same community, themselves unwilling to risk their lives, but willing to fight for their faith to the last slum-dweller” (18, quoted by Tutun Mukherjee 73, emphasis mine). I read Nandy’s statement as bearing certain hypotheses that qualify his understanding of slum-dwellers as categorical and exclusive. For instance, by classifying the entire “immigrant non-Bengali labourer” identity as uniformly “volatile and uncontrollable,” he in a way ascribes greater control, even-temperedness and soberness to the ones who are either native West Bengali, Bengali speaker by birth or belongs to the upper strata of Bengali society. By that logic, the native Bengali *bhadralok* is reckoned a paragon of all the aforementioned positive attributes. Additionally, Nandy uses phrases such as “broken community ties” and “desperation in these loyalties,” but never stops to pinpoint the economic enslavement of the slum-dwellers. These underdogs’ position neither favours them to settle in a compact colony life, nor allows them to overwrite their role as petty cogs to the politicians, who buy their “loyalty” in exchange of providing for the basics. It is curious that he associates the Dalit slum-dwellers with “nostalgic memories of faith” that make them the most susceptible groups to communal conflicts, whereas extremism around religion has always been engendered by the elites.

vital limbs for running the mundane odds of rural society. Following these uneducated labourer sections' coming to Calcutta, there was either no scope for practicing their family professions, or a "pull-factor" of the metropolitan lifestyle that urged them to get educated, disremember their traditional skills and thereby plunge into the fluid whirlpool of urban-inspired *bhadralok*-manufacturing. Biswas becomes the epitome of this section who constantly works towards parrying the shameful suggestion of *chhotolok*, correspondingly adapting himself to the "appropriate" codes of urban behaviour. The veteran *bhadralok* immigrants were in many cases more the architects of the hegemonic compulsions, and so were not much victimized by them.

When a Dalit family's sequestered status in the village is weighed against the supposed immeasurable freedom of the city, the overused binary imagination of city and country is problematized. Clichéd assumptions about the "Golden" rural East Bengal (Sonar Bangla), which is a sentimental metaphor created by the elitist East Bengali structure of feeling, are broken when studied through the eye of the subaltern refugee. For example, for Biswas, the "Golden Bengal," despite its invaluable memories as the birth-land, did not herald much rosy prospects:

We did not have a paddy field, nor own a fishpond. We had nothing. Just a small bit of homestead. Two hay-made rooms. They faced ground-wards in long hope for proper bamboo support; the head remained bowed within and without the home (*Deshbhager Smriti* 24, translation mine).

In the chapter "Dojbor Khujchhilo Dadu" ("Grandfather was looking for a Widower Groom" in *Allar Jomite Paa*), he remembers how their family was boycotted from every happy occasion in the village, following a dispute involving his father. The neighbourhood children secluded him because he belonged to a poor Dalit family. Class hierarchy pronounced itself even within the family web, as his paternal uncle, a salt dealer, would not communicate with them because his father was a barber. His elder brothers too were reluctant to place themselves in the family trade.

When his father's job would not run well, Biswas would accompany him in cutting and selling grass, which involved spending longer times in water. Consequently, his memory of the monsoon months in childhood is particularly of awkward friendlessness, owing to the putrid smell of rots in his hands (*Deshbhager Smriti* 24). Pitted against these realities, the narrator's nostalgia for bygone days in Magura cannot but be thinned with a sense of dejection. Only the broken references about his mother's perennial illness and waning health that ultimately leads to her death, form the purely emotional part of his memory.

In "Khali Paa, Alta-Paa," as Biswas describes his mother paying obeisance to the mistress of a wealthy household, who donates some clothes to them (93), the commonly imagined innocence of rural life is overthrown. Both Ranajit Guha and Pierre Bordieu see the body as a repository of the memories concerning "the basic principles of its culture" (55). According to Guha, particularly for the pre-literate societies that lacked any other mode of recording, inherited knowledge could survive only at the level of oral performance, wherein comes the importance of obeisance, which would hold the social balance of the State in terms of ascendancy and subjugation. Starting between husband and wife, or teacher and disciple, this would continue at the public level of high-caste and low-caste, as well as tenant and landlord (56).¹⁰¹ In the village culture, a poor Dalit woman's genuflection before an affluent lady implies

¹⁰¹ From bowing before the village upper-castes and -classes in pre-Partition East Bengal to the political guardians in post-Partition West Bengal, the Biswas family's allotment as Dalits do not impress any positive change with respect to the feudal modes of gestural reactions, as their bodies carry the same subsidiary status. On the other hand, a change could be expected, given that several Namasudra leaders, such as Hemanta Biswas, Apurbalal Mazumder and P.R.Thakur, besides Jogen Mandal, had come to the forefront in the post-Partition times, lending a voice to the Dalit refugees' civil liberties and rights. The Dalit evacuees in the camps were politically mobilized by the CPI Proja Socialist Party (PSP)-led *Sara Bangla Bastuhara Sammelan* (All Bengal Refugee Conference) and the Revolutionary Communist Party of India (RCPI)-led *Bastuhara Kalyan Parishod* (Refugee Welfare Council) (Basu Raychaudhury, "Life After Partition" 11). Yet, the fact that Dalit-ness is reproduced before the native community and the State in its prior form of social and economic suppression, points out to the inveterate nature of hierarchy in Bengal that could not have been possibly removed by upper-class educated Dalit heads, or the self-interested Communist demagogues. Ravinder Kaur notes that while the presence of the All-India Scheduled Caste Federation

caste subordination besides status difference. Moreover, as the aforementioned charity takes place during Durga Puja – the most special occasion for the Bengali Hindus, and as Joya Chatterji and Ranajit Guha observe, the biggest platform for the rich to flaunt their material abundance and social authority – such charity is by no means philanthropic.

Nevertheless, when Biswas' father similarly stoops before a Congress worker in post-Partition Calcutta, there is additionally no personal connection between the two individuals. The fact that relief is not conferred from one person to another but by a political system to the anonymous historical victims, renders it a faceless-ness. For small-profile people like Biswas and Byapari, the pre-Partition semi-feudal rural politics of Bengal were much more consequential than the nationalist politics. Despite uncongenial experiences due to rural caste system and internal rules and strata, there was, however, a scope for personal exchange in their respective East Pakistan villages, which is completely missing in Calcutta. The ugliness of the process of rehabilitation lay in its absolute detached handling of "cases" of refugees, who were treated as mere chain of records implying village and family names. Unlike the charitable lady in Magura to whom Biswas' mother pays homage, the "philanthropic" projects of relief-work by the political parties in Calcutta become a self-referential means of justifying the clout of certain nationalistic agendas, by muffling the voices of agitated Partition victims. As Partha Chatterjee suggests, from a pre-Partition village society to a post-Partition metropolis there is a shift in the mode of political power from feudal to bourgeois, the latter being characterized by "bourgeois notions of rule of law, equality before the law, *impersonal* procedures of administration and

in Partition politics indicates a high degree of political mobilisation and articulation within "Untouchable" communities, lives and experiences of the "Untouchable" Partition refugees are yet to be investigated (Kaur, "Narrative Absence" 285). At a pan-Indian level, Pandey studies the formation of an educated, secular and politically active Dalit subject in colonial and postcolonial milieu, and infers that the Hindu polity's "tolerance" towards every kind of Other – especially the "low-castes" and the Muslims – has an underlying superior connotation (Pandey, "Cognizing Community" 156-158).

justice, and the evolution of a political process in which the government dealt with bodies *which claimed to represent in some way or other the citizens of the country*" (Chatterjee, "Agrarian Relations" 17, emphasis mine). Such a system of control is coeval with the establishment of the capitalist state and may not always substitute feudal organizations totally, but permanently raze, in Chatterjee's words, "the peasant communities and...the bases of peasant-communal ideology" (15). Thus, for the Dalit peasant immigrants, Calcutta suggested a centripetal clone-processing grind that rejected their prior notions about land and labour, and through its compelling deaf-mute means of production, created a pre-set signification about the functioning of market. Unlike the village, the city would function through a motorized apparatus of reward and penalty, not holding within it the particularity of an immigrant's anguish or demand.

While Dalit empowerment is a phenomenon that could not have been felt but for the huge opportunity within the city life, it is the same capitalist hub that empties the subaltern immigrant of all his/her pre-existing distinctiveness, forcing him/her either to enter a cut-throat contestation with the *bhadralok*, or nonchalantly categorizing him/her as *chhotolok*. The pressure to accommodate with urbanity happens alongside new hurtful discoveries about older relationships, such as Biswas realizing one day that a village neighbour from Magura avoids him, for fear that he might ask for money.

Similar to Biswas' urban subaltern experience, Byapari's knowledge about living at the borders of a *bhadralok* colony offsets the post-Partition egalitarian promises of "revolution" and "change." He echoes Biswas' feelings of an isolated childhood, with the painful awareness that his younger siblings are chased out of playground by *babu*'s children, because of their shabby appearance. Regarding the inimical colony *bhadralok* populace, Byapari reflects:

This is my new experience in Calcutta. Back in our camp, ten arbitrators would solve the quarrel between two people. Here when ten aggressors attack one

person, others tend to stand at a distance and watch. They passively revel in a sadistic pleasure. Nobody draws near. Here, the rule is to defend oneself or else to die (*Itibritte* 119).

Compared to “*bhadra*” colony life, he thus shows the refugee camps to be closer to rural society, where some degree of fellow-feeling and reciprocation exists among the people. While camp life in suburban areas would not provide much earning opportunity to the Dalit refugees, the immigrant *babus* of squatter colonies allowed the Dalits a hand-to-mouth status, however precluding every chance of their seeing themselves as *bhadralok*.¹⁰² According to Byapari, caste discrimination was so deeply ingrained in the colonies that the poor felt ashamed and afraid to imagine themselves as respectable people. As Byapari states: “...In that country we did not have many possessions but unlimited peace of mind. We had our own culture, heritage and dignity. We had the means of subsistence for ourselves” (“Ananta Ratir Chandal” 208, translation mine), the change of life-pattern from ancestral village to the immigrated city becomes apparent.

Public Spaces: Dalit Incarcerated, Dalit Freed

Public spaces such as trains, railway stations, hospitals and prisons were infested by the Dalit refugees in the post-Partition period. This reflected the government’s incompetence in rehabilitating Dalits systematically. In the context of Partition, the symbol of the train is time and is associated with uncountable refugees, who were uprooted from their origins and forced to move to a new land to start life from the scratch. The gory and nemesis-driven subtext¹⁰³ that

¹⁰² Jogendranath Roy further describes this predicament, where immigration had pulled a massive population among the Dalit women into the labour force. Having lost their ancestral professions, the new generation refugee youths looked for work in the power loom factories and construction jobs. Owing to a greater supply of working hands than was demanded, the factory-owners would often buy workforce with minimal wages, resulting in many refugees becoming jobless and resorting to delinquency. Additionally, the Dalits faced a peculiar impasse after being dispersed to other parts of the country outside of West Bengal, as they were not given benefits based on their “Scheduled Caste” certificates but generalized as “Bengalis” (Roy 161-2).

¹⁰³ In the recent times, horrific pogroms by Hindu fundamentalists against the Muslims in the Gujarat riots (2002) had also begun with the Muslims burning a train filled with Hindu worshippers.

populates the Partition-centric train journeys additionally becomes an epithet of stagnation and teeming unemployment, in post-Partition West Bengal. Travelling on train without tickets is mentioned as a derogatory incident in the common parlance, and the “parasitic” Dalit refugee is often the chief suspect. For idealist youths like Biswas, train journey is unconsciously pregnant with the hope of “going back” to the place from where he came. For Byapari who is out to seek justice from the world for his family’s unbearable plight, the destination gradually becomes secondary and the train and station become his vicarious home. Byapari recounts an entire phase of his life as a runaway living in railway platforms and trains, with frequent incidents of travellers jettisoning him, roughing him up, casually offering food and approaching him for molestation. Likewise, in “Trainta Nitei Esechhilo” (“The Train Had Come to Take” in *Allar Jomite Paa*), Biswas is taken for a juvenile delinquent by the rail police, for boarding the train to Ranaghat without a ticket. Biswas’ quitting home as a grief-stricken youth and imagining to sneak across the border to Magura, or Byapari’s wandering in search of a better living, are perceived as punishable offenses in the eye of the law. Such an insensitive legal system fails to pinpoint the locus of their personal distress.

However, Biswas’ reaction on seeing the Sealdah station for the first time contradicts the “master narratives” about post-Partition Calcutta written by *bhadralok* immigrants, such as Salil Sen’s *The New Jews*. For a Dalit country-bred boy, the railway platform swarming with refugees and spread with different kinds of food induces a mood of endless carnival. In “Amra To Ekhon Indiy” (“We are now in India” in *Deshbhager Smriti*), the child narrator observes:

Those few days spent at the station were so blissful! Limitless stretch of space across the main, north, and even the south station. So many people eating on the platform itself! One need not ask openly, only standing and staring would make every one out of the five people offer something (34, translation mine).

Unlike the rest of the family members who were regularly looking around for cheap *jabardakhal* land or slum accommodation, the child's eye is caught in the glitters of city-life, as defined by uncountable urban people walking on the platform wearing shoes, or sing-song female voices pouring out of the loudspeakers. His euphoric spirit is itself a strong satirical response to the otherwise familiar portrayal of a dingy, corrupted, refugee-infested post-Partition Sealdah station, from which the *bhadralok* immigrants either dissociated themselves or to which they looked back with much reproach, horror and revulsion. Young Biswas' joy in such a dismal environment goes on to reflect that as a Dalit rural immigrant, Sealdah does not seem to him much worse than his previous existence. Only the *bhadralok* families, who had seen better days in East Bengal, could afford to despise Sealdah's filthiness. Their elitist and distant way of thinking cannot be applied to a Dalit child's first impression of urban geography. Thus, Biswas' initial view of Sealdah hardly meets the pan-East Bengali shared sentiment.

In the same way, "Bed Number Atash" ("Bed Number Twenty-eight" in *Allar Jomite Paa*) describes the rundown government hospitals and sanatoriums in post-Partition Calcutta, where Biswas as a poor Dalit child seeks respite and vies for his daily share of communal meal. His wish to stay back in the hospital, albeit its dirty surroundings, and comparing the option of a fuller appetite with that of unremitting toil and liabilities back home, represents the slum-allocated refugee homes as ruthless machines. His recurring symptoms of anaemia and weakness, for which he has to be frequently admitted to hospital, exposes the slum-life's hardship, which would extort labour even from the youngest member of the family. Life in the hospital offers Biswas the sense of luxury that the mundane cycle of school, tuition and factory work had long since denied him. This is not to refute that the same hospital later reduces every patient into mere bed-numbers. In this matter, the hospital is just like Sealdah, where immigrants

would dissolve into anonymous crowds, or the government-forsaken refugee camps, where the refugees would put up with starvation, insanitation and a feeling of self-inadequacy. Hospital and station stand for the panoramic width of Calcutta, where Dalit refugees would pervasively appear, looking to sell labour in exchange of remuneration.¹⁰⁴

Like Byapari's attachments to the train and the station, Biswas too sees the hospital as a pseudo-home away from home. The seamless structure of the hospital, in Biswas' words, "as if there is unrestricted access. Just like roaming in the fields and gardens back in the village" (*Allar Jomite Paa* 59), captures the adolescent refugee's yearning to go back to rural East Bengal. In the absence of economically stable family roots, these Dalit youths' bodies are subjected to public favour, charity, admonitions and whims in the transient spaces of hospital and train. Despite illegally boarding the trains, a starving Byapari is never arrested by apathetic ticket-checkers or taken to jail, where he might obtain some food.

Both Byapari and Biswas view jail as a source of free food rather than a space of moral correction, whose system runs by the same logic as that of the ration shop. This means if a *bhadrolok* inmate refuses the jail food, it automatically belongs to the non-*bhadralok* refugee, who can then accept it for not being tied to rigid dictates of moral decorum. Instead of grappling with guilt or shame, Biswas mentally works out the number of meals that he may be served during his stay in the jail. The police here symbolize the stock image of social benefactor, who reserves equal rights to scold and grant latitude, and drags away all miscreants in a row by

¹⁰⁴ The ugliness of these spaces is, however, not revealed at once to the unprejudiced child psyche. Rather than constructing his awareness about the negative qualities of Calcutta from a set of pre-fixed urban-rural binaries as created by the collective mainstream immigrant consciousness, the Dalit refugee's understandings rely on his own first-hand experiences. The same hospital that Biswas had initially viewed as the provider of food turns into a symbolic hell in the absence of proper care and medication, where he witnesses the deaths of "the uncle of thirty-three" or "the *dada* next to my bed" (*Allar Jomite Paa* 59-60). Moreover, the hospital also emerges as a perilous site of easy benefits, where Biswas could hoard food and money deviously, thereby ruining a Dalit refugee child's potential of turning into "poor but *bhadralok*" – an identity idolized amongst his kin and class members.

strapping them with a single rope. In this act, all kinds of crimes, petty as well as grievous, are metaphorically conflated within the single corrective structure of jail-house. Kibreab finds this dismissiveness to be common on the part of the officialdom while treating refugees: “The refugees were not conceived as individuals, but as clients whose problems, it was assumed, could be tackled by pre-existing solutions, planned and programmed in advance” (332). By depicting this facet of government’s rehabilitating scheme, Biswas evinces how rehabilitation itself is a method of infringing into one’s personal life “from above” and destroying its individuality.¹⁰⁵

Education Intercepting the Dalit Way of Being

The initial claustrophobia of public spaces like train, sanatorium or prison also breed a sense of optimism, resurrecting the social outcast towards new hopes and understandings, sometimes even conveying a greater tolerance and forgiveness than the “normal” civic circles. For example, life as a jail inmate strengthens Byapari’s position in terms of literacy and educated opinion. Prior to this, even as poverty had led him to politics, his lack of direct contact with the history of rebellion had rendered him an invisibility and blindness, which is typical among the uneducated Dalits. He states:

None of the actors of the past two hundred tribal and peasantry revolts had read the Das Kapital or the Redbook. Their consciousness of reality had forced them into rebellion. *I am neither a peasant nor a labourer. I have no country.* Life has not dug roots into the system and circumstances that inscribe my current existence. The profound knowledge that is required of a good political worker has after all remained unattained in my case due to illiteracy (*Itibritte* 170, translation and emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁵ This trivializing behaviour is momentous in shaping the refugee as a collective social malady, whence derives the straitjacket significance: “Thus, when the gap between bureaucratic expectations and the actual behaviour of the refugees became too wide, the former fell back on over-simplified stereotypical perceptions and labelled behaviour” (Zetter 1991, quoted in Kibreab 332).

Pitted against this susceptibility which results from ignorance, jail for Byapari is an illuminating space that drives home the “uncovered” truth about society, and exposes the darkest wrongdoings that take place in the presence of the guardians of law and order.¹⁰⁶ On the one hand, jail reveals the Naxals’ heinous torture in the hands of the goons, and on the other, provides pen and paper for “Dalit antisocial” Byapari’s education. By the time he comes out of the jail, his personality is significantly reshaped. His changed perspectives make him a misfit in his older social surroundings. Literacy inspires the ambivalent journey for the new educated Dalit refugee towards etching an alternate conception of *bhadralok*. Byapari’s new persona is riddled with doubts:

Books sate the appetite of one’s mind, but who would quell the fire inside the stomach? Returning to one’s old profession becomes a compulsion. Again I start carting the *rickshaw*. *Previously there used to be a dagger under my vehicle’s seat. Just in case I needed it! Now that space was occupied by book...* I have at present become very self-centric. The calamities occurring all over the world perturb me, hurt me, *but do not trigger me to act...* Do not exactly remember who said this – manual workers, take to books, it is a weapon. I instrumentalize book *in search of contentment* (*Itibritte* 199, translation and emphasis mine).

Byapari’s affinity towards learning comes from a quest external to class, caste and political alliances, as is concentrated around the word “contentment.” “Contentment” indicates a self-referential transcendental joy that aims for an aesthetic consummation hitherto connected only with the elites. Byapari’s discovery of self-satisfaction by reading books has a pathbreaking implication, daring to unsettle and compete with the *bhadralok*.

In the same way, Biswas’ journey unfolds an adverse yet extraordinary opening into *bhadralok*-dom, through his contact with Bengal’s literati. Despite excess burden of work, this phase sees rewards coming for the first time along with admiration and priceless company of the

¹⁰⁶ Owing to its extremely bloody nature, Byapari refrains from detailing the incident that had led to his imprisonment (*Itibritte* 173). It can, however, be surmised that he was in jail as a suspected political prisoner (175).

scholars. Biswas' aim for the graduate degree and desire to see himself in convocation robe urges him to take up the back-breaking and prosaic task of proof-reading. Hard work expedites his influx into the world and the class of the letters and the lettered, announcing his first footing in the vague but rapidly developing social constellation of the Dalit *bhadralok*. As he chooses to work for less money but in a field that involves the established names of Bengali literature, Biswas enduringly sets his class orientation in agreement with the sensibilities of the "refined."¹⁰⁷

The literacy of Dalit immigrants is a theme yet to be explored and appended to the existing Bengal Partition scholarship, whose main focus, as I have already stated, remains the tribulations of the middle-class immigrant *bhadralok*. It is a prominent argument by now that the subaltern, whose voice could be reached only via colonists' papered documents, is in fact unable to speak (see Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). As Ranajit Guha notes in "Negation," since the colonial times, education meant equipping the *sahukars*, *zamindars* and the *sarkar* with deceptive devices of dominance, such that destroying paperwork that documented peasants' debts was a concomitant part of the subaltern mutinies: "Writing was, thus, to him, the sign of his enemy, and 'favoured the exploitation of human beings rather than their enlightenment'" (52). In India, such rebellious moments were always a retaliation on the obstacles imposed by the authority on Dalit's education, and involved verbal inversions, such as usage of intimate and abusive social discourses. In that light, the Dalit refugees' literacy carries a historic charge in shaping the articulation "from below," by engaging with their own socio-

¹⁰⁷ In a way, he draws on what Guha would call "the rebel trying, positively, to appropriate the sign of writing for himself" (Guha, "Negation" 53). Emerging from a historical background where the British Raj had invested only on the middle-class' education in order to feed its own manpower, such that the subalterns' literacy cringed at the mercy of their local landlords, Biswas' service towards erudition helps to overcome his caste marker of Dalit that he had inherited from Magura, and the class marker of refugee *chhotolok* that he had picked up in West Bengal.

historical pathos about Partition. Biswas and Byapari's writings demonstrate why and how the so-called *chhotolok*'s access to knowledge brings the *bhadralok* to communicate with the literary-cultural nuances of the non-*bhadralok*. As I discuss below, the *chhotolok*'s literacy is also powerful in determining how much he wants to distantiate his own identity from the *bhadralok* aesthetic and ethical paradigm, and conversely, how close he can get to this pre-determined domain of "high culture."

While beginning to attract literary fame, Byapari consciously avoids the orthodox definition of *bhadralok*:

...I have imbibed a smattering knowledge of books, and have come to appreciate what was not known to me in the past, but I still remain an individual with a felonious record. And a *rickshaw*-puller too. Just as some people are born to savour the delicacies of the mortal world, some are intended to live off the scraps. Education has not bestowed me with a new pair of horns on my head or a tail... (*Itibritte* 200, translation mine).

However, his self-proclaimed labels of "people's writer" or "mouth-piece of the wage-workers" do not automatically posit him as a proletarian author. As he says that his yesteryears' nondescript identity of *rickshaw*-puller could not have been raised to the current state of eminence without help from dignitaries like Mahasweta Devi, he implies the importance of patronage and the way a system is exploited, in order to gain attention. His reputation as the "rickshaw-puller writer" has a tendency of promoting counter-sentimentality, or a sentimentality tactically returned at the core of elitist morality. With the aid of counter-sentimentality, he imitates the immigrant *bhadralok*'s self-piteous attitude, which the latter had earlier employed to portray a uniformly emotional picture of refugee victimhood and helplessness.

How the "writer" overrules the "rickshaw-puller" in Byapari's identity is manifest in his growing incompatibility with the "uncouth" female partner. He writes:

...The book-bug had bitten me. Hence I was not able to regularly cart the *rickshaw*. Poverty was a daily feature in the household, which led to incessant skirmishes...I had by then achieved some fame as an author. *Being only a rickshaw-puller had not generated the problem that I faced now, people's criticism would greatly affect me* (Itibritte 208, translation and emphasis mine).

There is a unique tussle around the new identity of the Dalit intellectual, with the veteran *bhadralok*, on the one hand, attempting to tag him by his past criminal record, thereby offering him jobs based on his prison experience rather than his literary talent, and the Dalit himself, on the other hand, refusing to make such equivocal living. Literacy adds an egoistic complex based on shame and self-consciousness in Byapari, which is very close to Biswas' feelings of guilt, replacing his previous anti-*bhadra* standpoint with an obsequious attitude. This is conveyed in the following internal strife within the narrator's mind:

...What if my readers, editors, publishers and writer colleagues get to know about this? If Mahasweta Devi accosts me and tells, "I can't imagine that you steal public goods!" (Itibritte 223, translation mine)

What is more, the "writer" Self makes an unforeseen disclosure about Byapari's newly-acquired gender perceptions, which is hardly comparable to his earlier camaraderie with the local prostitutes. In the garb of the bold writer, Byapari expects his legal wife to be "...soft polite docile." She, he says, "should not be very beautiful, or her beauty might make her conceited. Should have preliminary academic training. I do not expect to return home at the end of a hard day and teach my children. But she must not hold degrees, or else she might belittle me..." (Itibritte 210, translation mine). Here, he is theorizing a feminine complement that strives to impersonate the colonial *bhadralok*'s model of *bhadramahila* in the most unimaginative way. He also imbibes the *bhadralok*'s dual personality – radical in the public forum and chauvinistic on the domestic front. His attitude reveals that although the "Otherized" Dalit philosophy tries to maintain a separate entity at the level of class and caste, it mimics and takes home the unequal

values of upper-class gender relationship, giving a rather reactionary end to the apparently radical discourse. Byapari's first contact with fame and mock-enactment of power begins at the level of his hegemonic position at home. In his case, education is the ironic margin, on one side of which stands the illiterate and sexually violated male etching a unique class and gender position in the post-Partition historiography, and on the other, the literate and sexually prevailing macho figure, whose role in the family regresses to conventional heteronormativity.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as Byapari ponders whether to accept a questionable job offered to him, he starts to think the following:

Anu (his wife) is pregnant now. When she would come to visit me in the prison with our child in her lap, and the latter demand why, unlike other fathers, I too do not live at home but in the jail, how would my wife reply? ...I can tolerate starving but not the scorn of so many people. So I came back to my hutment in the marshy backlands (*Itibritte* 223, translation mine)

In this, he desperately clings on to the normative concepts of home and family in the footprint of *bhadralok* ideology. Belonging to a caste and class that had endured the greatest onslaughts of Partition in terms of rehabilitation, this becomes an almost instinctive act for him. Simultaneously, considering jail as a space outside of the "familiar" and the "prestigious" indicates his shift from former vagrant spacelessness into rooted-ness, by virtue of culture and literacy.

¹⁰⁸ Byapari can be read through the sexist characteristics that defined the otherwise "revolutionary" Naxalites, the extreme Left wing of the Communist Party, which had initiated peasant uprisings in the Northern West Bengal (1967). Srila Roy studies that in this "people's movement," "women's question" was either ancillary or interrupted with patriarchal anxieties. The Marxist economic determinism consigned the questions of marriage, sexuality and family to the private domain while creating power differentials on the gender grounds at the cultural level. While the early Marxist ideology vociferously critiqued the ideal of monogamous marriage, what the Naxalites espoused amounted to a self-possessed *bhadralok* version of this radicalism (Roy 102). Further, Ashok Mitra sarcastically points out the short-lived gallantry of the Naxalite movement: "In Andhra Pradesh, partisans keep ablaze the torch of rebellion lit twenty years ago. In Bengal, where it began, all is quite on the fronts, and many amongst those who organized the incendiary of the prairie fire circa late sixties or early seventies now quietly compose 'creative' copy for advertising firms" (Mitra, "Calcutta Diary" 2283). Suranjan Das notes that under New Left, West Bengal's record regarding women's empowerment in legislative politics is 9.5% of total membership, whereas the national demand is reservation of 30% of the parliamentary seats for women (Das, "West Bengal: New Left" 2118).

At this point, it is also important to illustrate the process of Dalit refugees' journey from unlettered-ness to literacy, as it critically re-shapes their perception about their immediate social surroundings. In the post-literacy stage, being aware of her/his own material and social subservience, a Dalit frequently applies education for vocalizing her/his personal, antithetical perspectives. However, education additionally complicates the process of reception of the upper-class behaviour, as s/he tends to espouse and reproduce the fundamental vices and corruptions of the gentry. This can be elaborated from the instance, where Byapari accepts a questionable job offer made by an influential politician from his opposition political party. As this deal involves people in power and thereby eliminates the risk of ill-reputation, Byapari chooses to give up his ideological constancy for upward mobility. Such self-contradiction essentially reduces him to the "first generation literate, highly earning and heavily bribed boorish populace" (*Itibritte* 293, paraphrasing mine) that he so much despises, and makes his autonomy and political subjectivity uncertain. In this case, Byapari's literacy becomes a means for continuing rather than challenging social asymmetry,¹⁰⁹ provoking the question whether a learned Dalit can inhabit a separate ethical sphere from that of the *bhadralok*, even as s/he successfully maintains her/his aesthetic-philosophical distance from the upper-class' clichéd accounts on Bengal Partition.

Such a question is all the more relevant, as a double-identity peeks through Byapari's autobiographical testimony. Consigning the episodes of misadventures to "*jibon*" (meaning "life" in Bengali), Byapari as if mediates his past Other personality from the retrospective

¹⁰⁹ According to Deleuze and Guattari: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is lacking in desire, or desire that lacks a free subject; there is no free subject except by repression" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 273). The generalized ideological subject is seen as a reverse of the connection between desire and subject, who is a socialized capital in possession of strong currency. Such a desiring subject, therefore, does not qualify as the Other. In case of Manoranjan Byapari the Dalit intellectual-activist, becoming of a free subject is through similar desire to repress and overcome the mainstream forces. His subjectivity is produced at the cost of upending his ethical headlock and capitulating to the material needs, at which point he also has to give up on his claim of being marginal and an antithesis to the Self.

vantage point of today's "Dalit *bhadra*" Self. So while "I" the first person narrative voice directly takes charge of the roles of political convict, writer and *rickshaw*-puller, the third person narrative voice relating "*jibon*'s" episodes hints that *jibon* is not the present Byapari, but his former life lived through insuperable circumstances. The narrative voice in the section where "*jibon*," rather than "I," is the protagonist is mainly about incidents in which Byapari is misled and molested, and focuses on those phases of life, where he lacks the agency of either a political fugitive or an intellectual. The first person educated author-narrator "I" disengages himself from "*jibon*'s" experiences of physical, spiritual and sexual cruelties.

In the case of Biswas, an implicit after-effect of Dalit refugee-ness continues within his new "*bhadralok*" designation. His becoming an author involves supplying an extra working-hand for miscellaneous chores, such as money collection, transportation of books and fetching food for other authors. Additionally, his poverty becomes the central point of reference in soliciting job opportunity. For instance, poet and writer Shakti Chattopadhyay writes in his reference to an editor: "I am sending Adhir. Closely associated to me. Very poor. Has a flair for writing. It is our duty to save him. If there is a job, he will survive" (*Allar Jomite Paa* 128, translation mine). Chattopadhyay's offhand language reflects a tone of sympathy and points to Biswas' economic necessity over the fact that he is also a promising writer in his own right. Thus, Biswas epitomizes a generation of poor Bengali immigrant intelligentsia, who would run shops on the footpath and write books, win trophies for their artistic feats and eat off the price of sold cups and medals. Poverty diminishes these Dalit refugees' scholarly assets into mere bartering items, time and again making them pay with labour for accessing a field conventionally not designed for them ("Kenoi Ba Agun?" ("Why Indeed This Fire?") in *Deshbhager Smriti*).

Biswas' precariousness becomes explicit while interacting with the native West Bengali or East Bengali *bhadralok* college students. His mind is conflicted while choosing between a branded cigarette, which is the signifier of middle-class "intelligentsia," and hand-made indigenous *bidees*. He avoids the company of friends at the Coffee House,¹¹⁰ as he is unable to spend like them and equally averse to take their favour. While the Coffee House is the breeding ground of intellectual debates, it nevertheless functions through certain pre-given mainstream yardsticks, as one of Biswas' friends reminds him: "One smokes (only) cigarettes here. Do not light a *bidee*. If you want, ask more from me" (*Allar Jomite Paa* 130, translation mine). Monobina Gupta further reflects how certain hangouts and patterns of living, such as smoking unfiltered *Charminar* cigarette, would define a brand of avant-garde cognoscenti, especially in the wake of a growing Communist atmosphere:

If violence raged on one side, the coffee houses and street cafes hummed with the spirit of the crazy, desirable 60s. The city's iconic Coffee House on College Street was filled with a haze of acrid smoke spiralling from tips of the unfiltered Charminar cigarettes dangling from lips of activists, musicians, theatre artists and poets. Charminar junkies jealously guarded their status as smokers of unfiltered cigarettes – they would not be seen dead smoking filtered cigarettes. The yellow end of a filtered Charminar robbed it of its sting, somehow making the smoker appear less radical (17).

The *bhadralok* that comes to light from the above description is someone who claimed to take forward the Leftist "revolution," yet could not give up on his habitual bourgeois fixed "tastes." A large section of the East Bengali middle-class had assumed and in fact instituted this futuristic Calcuttan Communist image in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. However, Biswas' timid placement in such groups shows his own doubtful position with respect to the communist ideology in West Bengal. His condition exposes the flawed theory that every refugee "*bangal*"

¹¹⁰ Coffee House was founded in 1876 in College Street, Calcutta. Poets, artists and literati from various fields of art and culture used to meet here. In the early 1960s, it became the hub of the avant-garde Hungry Generation literary-cultural movement.

was confidently “into the revolution” and responded to its compulsive thrusts. The following lines manifest Byapari’s similar baffled position with respect to the “revolution:”

...They won’t provide food for free. They will put bombs in my hands and direct me to fling them. Who to fling it at? This side or that side, standing in row are all artificial enemies. The real enemy is out of my reach. By that time I had realized this truth (*Itibritte* 173, translation mine).

This insight about his being exploited as a political firebrand, and realizing that such superficial conflicts do not address his own class and caste concerns, instigates Byapari’s sense of Otherness. Such a realization forms the basis of his consciousness as a Dalit refugee *chhotolok*-turned-*bhadralok*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have deciphered the differences of the Dalit writings from the elitist sentimentalities that have hitherto delineated and dominated the Bengal Partition literature. I analyse what literacy and concomitant genteel life means for the first-generation educated Dalit refugees, as they are increasingly absorbed in the main-vein of Calcutta. The necessity of analysing Dalit narratives transpires from the fact that the well-known oeuvres on Bengal Partition have mostly represented a categorically positive figure of *bhadralok* Hindu refugee. Such literary endeavours have failed to incorporate or justify the culture shock or the loss of morality among the poorer underclass immigrants in the materialistic vibes of Calcutta. For the Dalit scholars Byapari and Biswas, “Golden Bengal” does not herald similar romanticized nostalgia as in the *bhadralok* immigrants’ memory, as the former describe generations of naturalized exploitation and discriminatory village politics in pre-Partition East Bengal. Subsequently, because it is not easy for such a novice faction of literates to assume the standpoint of the mainstream East Bengali (“*bangal*”) immigrant subject, Dalit writings discussed in this chapter do not reinforce a counter-discourse only about “*ghotis*” (West Bengali

natives). The caste and class discursiveness of authors like Biswas and Byapari make them extrinsic to such banal arguments or binary identities.

In their writings, Biswas and Byapari cannot allege any significant economic erosion from their former status in rural East Bengal. As a result, West Bengal does not emerge for them as the hub of unexpected prosperity. The wish for a square meal is often the glue that motivates them to stay back within the city life. Growing up in post-Partition Calcutta is predominantly about hard work, morbid surroundings and serial encounters of deception. As Dalits whose blood relations are scattered all over West Bengal and India in pursuit of basic provisions, they make non-familial bonds with “outsiders” in temporary spaces, such as the railway platforms or the slum neighbourhoods. Torn between defiance and prescriptive behaviour, the Dalit refugees’ teenage years are at times beaten by *chhotolok*-ness and at other times re-established within *bhadralok*-ness.¹¹¹

Writing becomes an indispensable exercise for Byapari and Biswas to recapture the Bengal Partition ethos outside of the meta-experiential and sentimentalized axes, in which lay their chances of alternative survival: “Furthermore, rewriting some of their experiences as stories, and narrating themselves in new ways, allowed them to ‘re-story’ themselves in alternative ways *to those suggested by the identity ‘scripts’ available for displaced people*” (McAdams cited in Tennant, 2005, quoted by Pantazidou 280). In Byapari’s own words:

¹¹¹ Appadurai explains the complexity of the subaltern émigrés: “Thus [the poor] are neither simple dupes nor secret revolutionaries. They are survivors. And what they often seek strategically (even without a theory to dress it up) is to optimize the trade between recognition and redistribution in their immediate local lives” (Appadurai 65). By this, he means the Dalit’s attempt at establishing an identity through constant negotiation between cynicism and compliance with the exclusionary rules. For a post-Partition Dalit refugee, the metamorphosis into a new *bhadralok* class is the becoming of an entity of its own kind, who is driven by the desire to emulate the refined class, yet also takes hold of a distinctive educated tongue to preserve his own personal story in the bosom of overwhelming middle-class-generated Partition narratives. His is a situation close to the linguistic analogy that Marx offers with respect to the first bourgeois-democratic rebel: “a beginner who has learnt a new language always translated it back into his mother tongue” (Guha, “Negation” 75-76).

I must write. No, I was never sworn into any such promise. But it is compulsive for me so I write. Like a person drowning in an ocean gets hold of anything that he lays his hands on, I have held to my pen, and this is my personal affair...it is different for the composer of sugary romances. But for someone penning down the hard-core truth, the aim to construct the new cannot fructify without the deconstruction of the old...is this act of writing to attain social and material facilities? No...I am not such a powerful writer...still I do not wish to die (*Itibritte* 320-321, translation mine)...what I could not write today shall in all probabilities be written tomorrow. This writing is itself a gesture of war (322).

Writing out one's life in order to propagate one's entity is the process of becoming the Other Dalit narrator. Conflicting with yet bearing some germ of the established *bhadralok* class, the fluctuating psychic passage and continual dichotomy about rural and urban belonging, the experience as a Dalit and an immigrant, and the awareness of microcosms such as slums and railway platforms, altogether strings this new *avatar* of the "*chhotolok*-turned-*bhadralok*" far off from the point that had originally been the ideal of his journey.

CHAPTER 2: Beyond Sentimentality: “Tale” of an Alternate *Bhadramahila* Refugee

Introduction

Through a reading of Sunanda Sikdar’s memoir *Doyamoyeer Katha* (*Doyamoyee’s Tale* 2008, Bengali), in this chapter, I examine the development of an East Bengali immigrant woman’s perceptions outside the purview of nationalist history and what has come to represent the key motifs of Bengali refugee past. *Doyamoyeer Katha* is a recollection of the first ten years of Sikdar’s life, from 1951 to 1961, in an East Pakistan village called Dighpait in Jamalpur, Dhaka. Each chapter of *Doyamoyeer Katha* is a discrete, short piece of recollection about an incident in the village, which includes referring to a particular neighbour, a special festival, etc., which in many cases does not continue into the later part of the narration. While several characters of her childhood village keep intermittently coming back in different chapters, only the space of Dighpait and the time (the 1950s decades) are the two constant frameworks in the bulk of the narrative.

I study the formation of narrator Doyamoyee’s heterogeneous identity, to further the contention I have raised in Chapter 1 that it is crucial to revisit the dominating stereotypes created by *bhadralok* immigrant artworks, through reading of non-*bhadralok* refugee experiences. Doyamoyee is the local name by which Sikdar is known in her village, who does not conform with over-determined gender, class, communal and caste ideas, in a post-Partition rural setting. Her heterogeneous postcolonial femininity is explainable by Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s scholarship, which criticizes Western humanism’s arbitrary construction of a composite image of the “Third World woman.” Such a simplistic discourse cannot account for specific material and historical realities of the Third World women’s lives (Mohanty 19). My reading of the female characters in Sikdar’s text further complicates the notion of feminine

subjection and subjectivity. In many instances, womanhood in *Doyamoyeer Katha* is signified through contradictory traits of oppression and power. Doya's illustration of womanhood also confirms the argument of historical materialists, such as Alexandra Kollontai, who reject the existence of a separate "woman question" in isolation from socio-economic parameters (Kollontai 205).

I juxtapose *Doyamoyeer Katha* with the immigrant *bhadralok*'s canonical oeuvres on the Partition of Bengal, whose emotional use of Partition memory has time and again colored the mundane realities of East Bengali rural everyday with identical clichés. While *Doyamoyeer Katha* is also located in an East Pakistan village, which is one of the most exhausted themes in Bengali immigrant writings,¹¹² the narrator neither attaches loyalty to the nostalgic remembering of Partition, nor banks on romantic ideas for acquisition of power as an immigrant. Rather, there is a shifted and personalized meaning of "refugee-ness" in Sikdar's text. The central argument of this chapter is, thus, based on the absence of typified emotive tropes, such as the over-used metaphor of the placid, almost utopic depiction of East Bengal village¹¹³ in Sikdar's memoir, which have otherwise pervasively been used in *bhadralok*-sponsored narratives.¹¹⁴

¹¹² From Jibanananda Das to Sunil Gangopadhyay, Manik Bandopadhyay to Ritwik Ghatak, Bengali authors have extensively produced narratives about journey from *desh* to Calcutta, especially the post-Partition permanent immigration to a point of no return. Even as the post-Partition plots cannot be physically located in East Bengal, "the village" occupies a psychic space in the discussion of the ideal, and in simultaneous depiction of Calcutta's degraded society. In reference to "The Abandoned Village" (*Chhere Asha Gram*), Urbashi Barat reflects how the East Bengal village home has always been the emotional and spiritual centre, acting as a powerful pastoral image in Bengali literature and imagination (215).

¹¹³ By juxtaposing East Bengal's fertility with West Bengal's lesser agricultural abundance, its people's simplicity and talent against the Calcuttan's depravity and fakeness, its love for the Bengali language, culture and folklorist traditions against Calcutta's Westernized values, two permanent poles of "good" and "bad," "genuine" and "false" Bengalis have been erected, which continue in the present times. To begin with, this can definitely be taken as a logical defense mechanism by the *bangal* (East Bengali refugee) *bhadralok* against the innumerable deprecating jokes circulated about them by the *ghoti* (West Bengali native) *bhadralok* in West Bengal. As long as such spurious debates on "superiority" and "inferiority" exist in the regular parlance of everyday, it serves a harmless social interaction. But the problem arises, according to me, when the initially powerless immigrant Bengalis (especially the gentlemen class) accumulate power by constantly appealing either to their "lesser" status or by emphasizing

In the previous chapter, I examined how the Dalit refugee's perception about the Partition of Bengal intercepts existing elitist Partition literature and exposes the latter's prejudiced and calculated politics of sentimentalization. The Partition, creating a medley population in West Bengal in terms of class, caste, culture and practice, made it increasingly difficult for the *bhadralok* to maintain its monopolistic upper/middle-class, high-caste, educated Bengali Hindu overtones. Adhir Biswas and Manoranjan Byapari's journeys are examples of the new trends of looking at Partition, from first-generation Dalit intellectual immigrants' perspectives. Their writings cannot be enduringly divorced from the so-called *chhotolok* sensibilities, and hence pose awkwardness with respect to the mainstream *bhadralok*'s stock memories of Partition. The altered meaning of *bhadralok* as produced by these Dalit intellectuals is an offshoot of and yet, in its most radical form, a potential Other to the "refined" class. In this way, the Dalit *bhadralok* unsettles the traditional "authentic" meanings of *bhadralok*-ness, by including "marginal" customs and experiences.

their sheer positive qualities, without confessing the socio-economic and cultural networks that they have been exploiting, in the process of attaining success in post-Partition West Bengal. Under such circumstances, the romanticized Otherness as proclaimed by *bhadralok* migrants about themselves becomes an active tool for purchasing greater social capital. Repetition of these tropes in literature greatly paves the material aims, mostly by group creation of truisms. This romanticizing tendency is more prominent among the upper-caste middle- and lower-middle-class Hindu immigrants, who could not re-establish themselves completely without governmental aid. Their narratives about pre-Partition life attest to their own superiority, tending to balance their post-Partition status decline by imposing their legitimate claim to the land of West Bengal.

¹¹⁴ The latter can be defined in terms of the theory of affect produced by Brian Massumi and Sianne Ngai. Massumi argues that "sadness is pleasant" (*Ugly Feelings* 24) and "matter-of-factness dampens intensity," drawing on the empirical observation that the most emotional version of an art is the most remembered, whereas the factual version is rated the least pleasant and is the least remembered (Massumi 23). According to Ngai, much like Raymond Williams' "structure of feeling," affective intensities "exert palpable pressure and set affective limits on experience and action" (*Marxism and Literature* 128, quoted in *Ugly Feelings* 26). I also see the canonical Partition works as mostly informed by what Spinoza states as the conscious reflection, which is a doubling of the idea of affectation (Massumi 31). On the other hand, Lawrence Grossberg's definition of daily life as the site of struggle against "hierarchically organized modes of modern cultural power" (Grossberg 94), rather than a utopic "land of political redemption" (*ibid.*), as well as his idea of "micro-level" (96), where power sets off complex and contradictory practices, describe the human relations in Doya's village Dighpait.

On the other hand, the traditionally produced meaning of *bhadramahila* suggests that it is a feminine complement of the identity marker *bhadralok*. Through its spatially delimited and gendered form of arrangement, *bhadramahila* is supposed to reinforce, rather than dispute the smooth functioning of the elite class. In this light, I enquire how far Doyamoyee, born in the *bhadralok* fold, conforms to the standardized dictates associated with her class. Does she remain an amorphous historical by-product of middle-class imagination created by the ambitious *bhadralok* since colonial times? If not, what kind of second category does she fall into? What is the perspective of such a not-so-*bhadramahila* towards society's communal and caste non-*bhadra* constituents? In answering these questions, this chapter demonstrates the difficulties of confining Doya's identity into a fixed category of refugee-ness as belonging to the middle-class.

Ella Moore describes that in the post-independence era, the *bhadralok*, by virtue of his class position, social status and education, became an agent in creating knowledge, as he was privileged to record his own experience in the process of history writing. Therefore exploring the voices of women, peasants and children, many of which are lost or irretrievable, can provide the Partition scholarship with a "wealth of perspective" (n.p.). Specifically in the context of an "alternative narrative of partition," Moore states: "...marginalised groups such as women had traditional roles which were dictated by a paternal authority within families, limiting their expressions of freedom" (n.p.). Bidyut Chakrabarty, moreover, elucidates that it is not enough to know the popular upper and middle-class narratives on Partition because it is: "...evident that the high politics of partition constitute the background of the majority of the stories" (n.p.). Moore further notes that mainstream history, in which major political factions such as the Congress and the Muslim League invested their allegiance, was exclusivist in nature, failing to address the in-between clusters "...not represented by the majority and had their own peculiar concerns and

interests” (n.p.). She, thus, realizes the exigency of documenting the non-*bhadralok*’s gender, class and caste experiences, in considering a multi-dimensional view of Partition.

As Tanika Sarkar observes, in a traditional Indian set-up, a woman’s class, caste, geographical and even communal belongingness are entirely predicated on her male relations, which she virtually repeats. She is automatically enfolded and made a symbol of the respective patriarchal frontier in which she is born or located by virtue of marriage. In this way, a woman’s body is utilized to represent the class, caste and community of her male kin, and thereby in defining rivalry among different patriarchal groups.¹¹⁵ According to Spivak, class consciousness is inbuilt with the feeling of community that belongs to national links and political organizations, not to the structural model of family. A positivist inclusion of women as a collective oppressed body, who articulates against the monolithic disembodied system, or mere incorporation of family within patriarchal social relations will not break the Marxian class solidities, which compartmentalizes family within a masculine framework (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 277). Additionally, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan notes that even as agency is regarded as an inherently radical force for women and other subordinate groups, such empowerment cannot be celebrated as a “pure state of volition or action, but is complexly imbricated in the contradictory structures of patriarchy” (“Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist?” WS-37). Hence, through a reading of Doyamoyee’s character, this chapter complicates conventional notions about the East Bengali *bhadramahila* and explores her alternate representations in a post-Partition milieu, with respect

¹¹⁵ Urbashi Barat states: “In Bengali writing, the woman is frequently seen as the (sole or primary) upholder of the community’s history and identity; her body is the sign through which are conducted the interactions and contests between rival patriarchal concepts and groups” (Barat 218). Similarly, Amrita Basu notes that interplay of religious, class and gendered identities both creates women’s activism as well as undermines their autonomy. Owing to contradictions in women’s agency and activism, they do not possess unified identities or interests. Complexity arises when women reject the feminists’ opposition to religious nationalism; the religious nationalist’s negation of class, caste, gender and regional identities; and the nation-state’s assumption of them primarily as self-sacrificing mothers and wives (Basu, “Appropriating Gender” 4).

to the male and female members from “non-*bhadra*” communities, who come from different caste, class, linguistic and religious backgrounds. It is impossible to examine Doya’s personality without understanding the respective male figures from her familial and geographical settings, with whom she is in a constant dialogue, besides the indirect intervention of the national-political actors. For this reason, while analyzing her journey, I also study the males that influence the process of development of her individual persona.

Nationalistic History, Canonical Memory and *Doyamoyee*’s “Nowhere-ness”

Ranabir Samaddar claims that memorial writings are “undiluted political act” (“The Historiographical Operation” 2239), and that only historical motions, with their “impartial” stance, can help evolve discourses of right, dignity and citizenship. Samaddar is as cynical about the possibility of a guiltless memory, as he is critical about the literary works that claim ahistorical scores. In his understanding, not only is history more powerful than literature, but historicized memorial writing “kills “pure” memory, and becomes another history” (2238).¹¹⁶ As a contrary viewpoint, Jill Didur emphasizes alternative depictions of “everyday,” as is presented in literary narratives, rather than relying only on state-sponsored historiography.¹¹⁷ Examining literature in terms of its “diffractive” or interfering rather than replicating quality, Didur downplays the role of “empirical verifiability” that scholars like Talbot attach to literature. In this regard, Nandi Bhatia’s observation of the Foucaultian unleashing of the suppressed parallel

¹¹⁶ Equating the production of memory to Walter Benjamin’s reflection on mechanical reproduction of art, such that it becomes an “absolute embarrassment for politics” (Samaddar, “The Historiographical Operation” 2239), Samaddar invests on historical activism which, in breaking off from memory, becomes a “coveted moment of politics.” According to him, the figure of the confused “average” man may become a subject in charge of ruthless powers as embodied in Nazism and Zionism, through his historical passivity born out of the burden of memory.

¹¹⁷ Mushirul Hasan also makes the same point that creative writings are a judicious way of rewriting history, as they expose the inadequacy of official narratives on independence and Partition, and compel alternative themes and approaches “that have eluded the grasp of social scientists...” (Hasan, ed. *Inventing Boundaries* 39-40).

histories is useful for realizing the shortcomings of official history, on which Samaddar rests his hope. In the context of Partition, Bhatia reads this latter version as charged with national interests and focused mainly on the debates raised by the leaders and decision-makers of postcolonial India. Ritu Menon, Mushirul Hasan and Urvashi Butalia also recognize that the official nationalistic history cannot account for the subjective traumatic experiences of the immigrants. They emphasize refugees' memories and personal knowledge of Partition in forming parallel discourses. Yet, it is wrong to assume that a monolithic and unbroken perspective can be obtained from such alternative narrations and the critics point this out as well.

The difficult side of literary writings appear, as they attempt to deliver a generalized view on Partition, as can be read in Sukrita Paul Kumar's following statement: "In the literary narrative, though the historical aspect remains intact, the experience is likely to transcend historicity *and becomes a universal experience*" (Paul Kumar 235, emphasis mine). My thesis is a wary response to the class-specific ghetto of documentations that such "universal" narratives have a potential to shelter. Even though memorial literature does a relatively greater justice to the commitment of democracy in representation than nationalistic accounts, they are also likely to serve selective and thereby hierarchical facets of nostalgia, especially as they tend to repeat certain patterns of memory. In this way, the heteroglossic texture of post-Partition narrativity can be trapped into upper-class upper-caste headships.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Moreover, there is a certain violence involved in bringing to light the silenced pains underlying personal life-stories of the marginalized people. Anne Hardgrove's research raises the ethical question associated with the second abduction of a female Partition victim's identity, through interventions of scholarly research in oral history. Even the most sensitive scholarship that raise vociferous protests against the State's coercive projects, risk stereotyping these women as set symbols of identity for the purpose of contemporary research (Hardgrove 2427). Such a woman's self-identity is never restored with respect to her belonging. In contrast, questions raised by the scholars freshly jeopardize her national and familial balances (2429). According to Hardgrove, there is, thus, a guilt associated in the act of seizing their "flawed" Self in defining the alternative understanding of Partition. The questions of "true" origins are especially problematic in this context, in the author's words: "Are our own reified conceptions of 'identity' and 'community' being mapped when we ask women what side of the border they 'really' "

The “universal experience” that Paul Kumar observes in Partition literature can be applied in understanding the category of “archive” that Dipesh Chakrabarty notices in the case of Bengali history-writings. According to Chakrabarty, these archives are “politically constituted,” aimed at remaking society by fetishizing life through “time-tested virtues and values” that tend “to be popular and therefore national if not always democratic” and yet “different from the cold facts of the history recorded in official documents” (“Romantic Archives” 677). They inextricably connect fiction, politics and history, interposing official accounts with imagination. This kind of archival tendency also explains the *bhadralok* refugee’s canonical Partition narratives, where facts and imagination collude to create certain narrow and pre-anticipated conclusions. While the historical and political information in these narratives are selected and fine-tuned in agreement with the author’s pre-fixed agendas, the fictive aspects assume historical authority with the help of formulaic plots.¹¹⁹ Fictional accounts claim the legitimacy of a separate but more valid history, by going back to particular mythical, geographic and cultural points of connection in reference to the exiled East Bengalis, fashioning a brand of reality in which only a nominated group of refugees see their own reflection.

belong? (2429) Thus, soliciting scholarly witnesses can be at the cost of alienating these women in their current environment. Under such portents, Hardgrove rightly asks who this rewritten history is being created for” (2430).

¹¹⁹ My view is shared by historians Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit, who see an essential similarity between historiography and fiction, or the aesthetic and structural levels, especially in terms of fictionality of structures (LaCapra, “Writing History, Writing Trauma” 8). Moreover, what Ankersmit recognizes as the politics of history that claims to say the “true” things and thereby construct “pictures of the past” narrative substances, is observable among canonical narratives. Memorial documentation, especially by virtue of collective assertion and repetition, can as much command a totalitarian substitution for the absent past and be prone to fetishism and closure, as a historical text. As LaCapra notes, the fictional narratives, in fact, outdo the historical recording in terms of truth claim “by giving at least a plausible “feel” for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods” (LaCapra 13). He concludes that this “mutually interrogative relation” between historiography and art complicates identity or binary oppositions between them (15).

Even though *Doyamoyeer Katha* holds loyalty in parts both to history and fiction, it resists making truth-claims either like official history or archival literature. Doya's "tale" is liable to be claimed by both "major" history as well as "minor" quasi-historical literary works on Partition. Yet, because such a "tale" does not serve any premeditated goal to which both romanticized history and historicized nostalgia are devoted, it will not find a comfortable membership with either.¹²⁰ As the case of Bengal suggests, Partition narratives have overpoweringly high references to rape and abduction of victims among women, or to the larger-than-life martyr heroines within the domain of family. Among the male protagonists, attention is given on those who grow up into an actor or a pawn in the Partition discourse. These storylines fail to speak for the less extremely victimized subjects, as well as the Dalit, female and juvenile refugees. As the pioneer authors of Bengali Partition literature have defined East Bengali-ness by the middle-class Hindu gentry's parameters of thoughts, tastes and attitudes, there is a lack of literary space and appreciation for immigrant authorships that do not identify with these "herd" descriptions. Not bearing any sign of either the nationalistic high-politics or the elitist counter-themes, Doya's memoir's ordinariness destabilizes the basis of what it means to be an East Bengali immigrant and a direct inheritor of the Partition pangs. In a way, her story-telling upsets both official history and *bhadra* nostalgic literature.

¹²⁰ Doyamoyee's narrative can be compared to the Derridian *différance* or what LaCapra calls "an anxiety-ridden middle area of undecidability," which resists sharp dichotomous binary formations...the "in-between voice" marked by "unavailability" or "radical ambivalence of clear-cut positions" (LaCapra, "Writing History, Writing Trauma" 20). Such a position holds transferential relation to the ongoing historical process (36). Yet, in my reading, even as this *différance* in Doya does "disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions..." (21), her writing does not bear the testimony of "compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes," as is the characteristic of post-traumatic writings. Rather, as a counterforce to the phenomenon of numbing and objectification, of which historiography is found guilty, Doya's narrative is informed by empathy, which, in recognition of its own limitations, tries to recapture others' experiences (40).

***Bhadra* Memories and Doyamoyee's Memoir: Different Perspectives**

In post-Partition West Bengal, the *bhadralok* immigrants seized the center-stage through their self-portrayal as veritable patriots. They expected a higher status with respect to the natives, by asserting their contribution in the Indian independence, which they thought was unfairly repaid. Depicting a self-image based on victimhood, Hindu refugees reiterated the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim communal tension,¹²¹ and acted as vanguards of a carefully preserved and disseminated past. Their attitude towards the Muslims was shaped by the hegemonic discourse of “Bad Muslims” in Bengal. Since the pre-Partition phases, “Good Muslims” were those who abided by the Hindu ritualistic beliefs, whereas the ones voicing for the Muslim League and a demand for Pakistan were seen as a paradox and a breach from the past: “...a modernist dream of ‘junking the past’ gone completely mad, a discordant image on a canvas of harmony” (“Remembered Villages” 2150).

Thus, following the Partition and migration, the *bhadralok* public memory of East Bengal celebrated a Hindu spatio-social spirit over the common Bengali ethnicity.¹²² Regarding the supposedly “pluralist” and “secular” *bhadralok* narratives, Manas Ray observes:

¹²¹ Sukrita Paul Kumar notes that narrativity of Partition, especially through a spatial-temporal distance from the author's contemporaneity, entails a strong use of imagination, which allows transformation of historical truth into a fictionalized one, with all rights of the latter's autonomous existence. Arguably, such a narrator is removed from the position of objective perception and judgment. In this respect, nostalgia is instrumental in giving vent to a host of newly encountered emotional as well as socio-cultural orientations (Paul Kumar, “On Narrativizing Partition” 231). While Kumar enumerates a number of Partition oeuvres that border on the idyllic picture of pre-Partition communal harmony, such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Kartar Singh Duggal's *Twice Born, Twice Dead*, and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (233), most other works contribute to what she calls, borrowing from Alok Rai, “a pornography of violence,” meaning, an effort to epitomize Partition only by scenes of carnage and devastation, thus making a slavish imitation of the melodramatic historical moment in fiction and art, and thereby indulging in horror with the aid of literature (234-35).

¹²² According to Richard L. Park, even after the partition of Bengal, East Bengal, the only province of East Pakistan, comprising a 52 to 55% of the total population of undivided Pakistan, expressed greater ethnic affiliation with the Indian Hindus than with the fellow West Pakistanis. In fact, the minorities of Pakistan forming the Pakistan National Congress and the Scheduled Caste Federation demanded Pakistan to take after the secular Indian nation state, in order to alleviate the economic ills of the minorities. Leonard Gordon looks into the aspect of “identity

The Muslims were a constant presence in...stories but only in the figure of the eternal peasant, hardworking, obliging, happy with his marginality, part of the Hindu domestic imagery. No space was allowed to his rituals, his universe of beliefs nor did the middle class Muslim ever figure (168).

Such narratives would define “homeland” in terms of an exclusive Hindu sacredness, by strategically disregarding the Bengali Muslim component of history.¹²³ Dipesh Chakrabarty mentions that the sacredness originates from patriliney or ancestral connection, where worshipping one’s village and land implies one’s reverential feelings for the forefathers.¹²⁴ Yet, because home also connotes “bhite,” a Bengali word whose etymological root goes back to

redefinition” for the Bangladeshis through the often clashing issues of nation formation, ethnic identity, political culture and mobilization (Gordon 279). Forced to adhere with exclusive identities such as “Hindus” or “Muslims,” “Indian” or “Pakistani,” as Gordon puts it, these people “...who were pushed in a time of crisis to identify with one political community having a particular national design demanded new choices in later circumstances” (280).

¹²³ While feminists argue that it is important to take into account women’s actual experience of the home, rather than dismiss its importance because of its ideological “naturalization,” in case of the aforementioned idyllic site of rural domesticity, the housewife’s image, notwithstanding its nuances, is modified according to larger patriarchal social requirements, and distilled to fit into the classical Hindu concept of the pure inner domain. Rather than a lesser complement of the public sphere, such a “home” is hypothesized as former’s source of strength and inspiration.

¹²⁴ This attitude of worshipping is related to seeing one’s home or *desh* as the moral unit of the nation. As Gautam Ghosh observes, the concept of *kuldebata* or the family deity contained within it the kernel of patrilineal sacredness. *Kuldebata* was considered as a member of the family and inter-generationally worshipped typically by the male head (Gautam Ghosh 28), which gives the picture of a phallocentric god-human relationship in exclusion of the Other, such as the woman, the Dalit servant or the juvenile. The deity’s responsibility towards the protection and prosperity of the family’s lineage and well-being of the family’s “ancestral estate” (31) is equivalent to the *bhadralok*’s self-proclaimed flagship and embodiment of the spirit of Indian culture and nationality. Correspondingly, transgressions against the household deities were often symbolic of decline of the Hindu masculine dominance in East Bengal and thereby the chief cause provoking evacuation. The purview of the family deity’s presiding could include an entire village (32), such that the interrelationship between the deity, genealogy, land and village was constitutive of a continual system of social hierarchy and non-uniform power, gaining force from the cycle of domestic religiosity (35). During the nationalist period, the historical consciousness of the *bhadralok* derived from and converged with the emotional force of moral consciousness. The deity’s blessings empowered an individual to act on behalf of the national community. Partha Chatterji reads the elitist representation of this indigenous “inner spiritual” domain as a counter-theory to the “external material” world, which helped to define the sovereign nationhood of India (24). In this endeavor, the figure of Ramakrishna the anti-elite rustic personality and worshipper of the feminine principle is extensively appropriated by the *bhadralok*, as an expression against colonialism, as well as with the worldview of bridging the elitist identity with the common people of the nation. For the *bhadralok*, Ramakrishna becomes the idealized secular symbol, just like one’s *desh*, positing the category of religion between an exclusionary capitalist world “from above” and the religious mentality “from below.”

“bhitti” (foundation), mention of sacredness in these narratives implicitly assert a natural connection and right of the Hindus over the East Bengal geography.¹²⁵ The narratorial voices recounting the past transcend the identity of the first person speaker “I,” and thereby the urgent emotional involvement, and instead builds on an affect, which, as Ngai explains, is formed through the onlooker’s distant re-production of a third person feeling (25, 27).

Differing from these *bhadralok*-constructed accounts, Doya’s narrative acts as a safety valve against the congealing “ethnography of partition narrative,” which is based on “presenting the spectacular to the purported reader and thus claims a certain authenticity over the events and lives caught up in the turmoil” (Chakravarty n.p.). Sikdar “does not care to give us a *representative* narrative of trauma and tribulation; it gives us an everyday, quite situated account of one person’s impressions over her surroundings, without an iota of sentimentalizing” (n.p.). The name Doyamoyee, which means compassionate, epitomizes the humane crux of the narrative. It is juxtaposed with the cruel activities and unforgiving beliefs propagated during the Partition. Despite belonging to the Hindu upper-caste fold, and someone who had to evacuate her ancestral home and migrate to India, Doyamoyee’s recollections do not bear the usual accusative or elegiac tone that is common in mainstream Partition literatures.¹²⁶ She begins with the

¹²⁵ It is important to note that the same land which had been treated in the past as the hereditary site of homosocial bonding through rightful transference of property among male heirs, re-emerges as the motherland – the figure of a dismembered helpless mother, in the course of nationalist movements. Ruining for one’s attachment to this “Mother” is a principal facet of the immigrant narratives, even though visualizing the land through ideas of femininity and motherhood is a typical elitist patriarchal dream. Thus, Chakrabarty rightly warns the reader against drawing any parity of the Bengali rural society with the system of matriarchy. Amrita Basu also points out to this difference between nation, which is imagined as motherland, and state, which is perceived as the father, which can either be benevolent or authoritarian, in a South Asian context (Basu, “Appropriating Gender” 6). While Ritwik Ghatak, Jibanananda Das and Atin Bandopadhyay are among the immigrant artists who repeatedly bring back this metaphor of “Motherland,” Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *Ghare Baire* makes a strong criticism against the hypocritical demagoguery that can possibly justify the nationalistic idealism around “Motherland” and “Mother India.”

¹²⁶ Renowned Partition author and an immigrant himself, Sunil Gangopadhyay cites the following reason behind the dearth of Bengali literature on Partition: “Pakistan accommodated eleven per cent Hindus and India provided shelter to twenty percent Muslims. Our Bengali writers were aware of this sensitive issue and real presentation of

incident of her childhood Muslim caretaker having come to visit her in 1971 from Dighpait, after selling off his last belongings. Instead of repeating her own experiences of Otherness with respect to the native Bengalis, Doya remembers the insensitive suspicion that her poor old attendant incurs after coming to India, as another Bangladeshi infiltrating the border with sketchy motives. Against the riotous timeframe of the Liberation War (*Mukti-juddho* of 1971),¹²⁷ his presence as an expatriate poses a threat to the Indian nation-state due to his linguistic, cultural and religious differences from the local populace, in addition to his material circumstances. Sikdar suggests that the economically downtrodden East Bengali migrants, regardless of the community they belonged to, were the worst victims of Partition. Rather than extensively describing her own predicament, her starting point is a Dalit peasant, which counteracts the lengthy accounts of *bhadralok* refugees in better-known Bengal Partition narratives, and by that same reason, individuates her work from these canonical texts.

Striving to intersect everyday life with a casual reading of history, Doya's writing has no obligation to reproduce accurate registers of events. She neither maintains space-time continuum conscientiously, nor tinges her characters with permanent religious, class and caste meanings.¹²⁸ Her bonding with fellow villagers weaves in an ingenuous spirit of human interdependency,

this horrible reality could have triggered further riots. That is why, many of our writers avoided the issue of Partition. And the writers whom I mentioned wrote from nostalgia, not a real point of view" (Bhadra 102). By this, the *bhadralok* author intimates violence to be the only possible referent in a "realistic" Bengali Partition literature.

¹²⁷ The Bangladesh Liberation War broke out in March 26, 1971 against West Pakistan, when the West Pakistani Army launched its Operation Searchlight on the Bengali civilians, in defiance to the 1970's first democratic elections result, in which Awami League, the East Pakistani political party had won. The key factors fomenting this war was the ethnic and linguistic discrimination against and imposition of Urdu on the Bengali Muslims by the Governor General Mohammad Ali Jinnah, which resulted in the rise of a Bengali nationalist sentiment.

¹²⁸ Instead, she refers to a self-complete fluid cosmos, in Chakravarty's words: "...at once historically ensconced and yet transports it beyond the narrative of after-effects of mass exodus...a very subtle politicization of the genre of the memoir without getting busy, exemplary or politically correct... Daya's tale...does not forget, but calibrates and fine tunes memory so much that there is scant scope for wide eyed exuberance around 'affective' this 'subjective' that" (Chakravarty n.p.).

which is similar to the ecological law of the natural world. Her caretaker Majam *dada* inculcates this minimalism in her, telling her that one should pray to God for the blessing of rice and rain for all people on the earth, and for the good of animals, insects and trees (cover page, translation mine). While praying to Allah, Doya asks “to do everyone good, to satiate the hunger of all with rice, to repeal the system of passport¹²⁹ and to stop every kind of disagreement” (84, translation mine), which poses her primarily as a humanist. The complexity in the narrator’s part-rural part-urban connections, coupled with refugee-native, Bengali-non-Bengali, high-class-low-class, Dalit-caste Hindu as well as Hindu-Muslim sense of correlations, altogether helps in construing a shifting, fluctuating Self. She is neither committed to the cause of idealism nor speaks in a hyperbolic tone. In her third person narrative voice, she never surpasses the premises of spontaneous equity and secularity, such that her “tale’s” characters are not overshadowed either by her love or by her empathy. As a narrator, even as she gains admittance into everybody’s collective and personal emotions, her presence is not like that of the intrusive nationalistic politics. She delineates the characters in a non-hierarchical fashion, without concocting spot-on solutions to their problems or justifying about their actions. For example, she mentions Sudhir *dada*, whom others would mock because of his “feminine characterisites,” but who she thinks is very beautiful (56-57); Ailakeshi, whose marriage is terminated because she “never had a father,” causing her mother to suicide (58-59); Ratkandu *da*, an infamous kleptomaniac of the village, whom she, nevertheless, likes very much (59-61); Modina *bhabhi*, a housewife, who feels a desperate unrequited love for her expatriate childhood-mate Suresh Lahiri, whose

¹²⁹ The introduction of passport system in 1952 had precipitated fresh exodus from among the Hindu minorities, even before the scheme was implemented. In 1956, the Indian government had announced “migration certificate” to control the refugee influx, by regulating it as authorized migration. In order to mitigate the inflow, it was decided that the government will offer no relief or rehabilitation to people infiltrating after March 31, 1958 (Nakatani, “Away from Home” 85).

departure causes her to lose her mind (69-71). While these individuals could have been treated as “aberrations” from the standards of a “*bhadra*” storyteller, Doya never attempts to expunge their presence. Her memoir therefore not only celebrates the village’s “prestigious” background, but also takes account of the foppish male, the single mother, the thief and the extramarital affair. Seen this way, her writing is a break-off from the major *bhadralok* immigrant narratives, which show the Bengali Hindu “home” only as the breeding ground of nationalist history, enumerating the exploits of Hindu rulers, pundits and political leaders, who glorified their respective villages with significant feats at the national level.¹³⁰

Doya lacks any anxiety with regard to proving the accuracy of her reminiscence before the West Bengali public, who took many of the refugee accounts to be “exaggerated” and “unreliable” (Chatterjee).¹³¹ Freestanding of the contemporary political map that severed Bengal into two, her actions are oblivious of the spasms of hatred and have an inbred agency of the

¹³⁰ This trend is observable since the 19 C, such as in Bengali history writings by Dineshchandra Sen, which was profoundly influenced by English romantic and classicist poetry traditions, and bearer of explicit convictions. Among Sen’s contemporaries, Suniti Kumar Chatterji disapproved of his idea of “Greater Bengal,” which projected Bengali Hindus as the bulwark of Bengali literature and culture, at the cost of ignoring the contributions by the Bengali Muslims. In fact, a Calcutta-based journal *Shanibarar Katha* (Saturday’s Mail) distorted Sen’s essay’s name with a mock-Persian touch (Dineshnama, or “The Tale of Dinesh”), criticizing that his work was closer to the fictive genre of novel than history (Chakrabarty, “Romantic Archives” 670). According to Dipesh Chakrabarty: “For those who, like Sen and others of his generation, had seen literature as quintessentially political, the past was constituted, ultimately, not merely by historical evidence but also by emotional and experiential recollections of the past” (671). Among canonical Bengal Partition literature, avant garde East Bengali poet Jibanananda Das’ poetry is rife with references from a Hindu Bengali past, comprising mytho-historical figures like Raja Ballal Sen, folk goddesses *Chandi* and *Manasa*, *Mahabharata* characters, Bengali Hindu poets such as Mukundaram, Chandidas, Ramprasad, and even present-day Swarajist political leader Chittaranjan Das (679). Das’ poetry has been time and again treated as a beaconing light for the so-called rationalist authors of numerous political movements. To cite more, Salil Sen’s play *The New Jews* (*Natun Ihudi*, later made into a film in 1953) presents characters as symbols of mainstream Hinduized version of the Partition of Bengal, such as the mother’s name being “Annapurna,” which simultaneously refers to the Hindu goddess of bounty and the Hinduist imagery of fertile East Bengal. The play opens with D.L. Ray’s patriotic song that invokes the Hinduist nationalistic Swadeshi Movement. Chakrabarty notes that the Bengal Literary Academy’s (Bangiya Sahitya Parishad) negligence towards the Bengali Muslims became so explicit by early 20 C that the Muslim intellectuals set up a separate Muslim Literary Association (Muslim Sahitya Samiti) in 1911 (668).

¹³¹ Janice Haaken states: “In the rush to produce women’s recollection as authentic, their faculty of imagination is undermined. This faculty is vital in resisting patriarchal control and imagine a world beyond it” (Haaken 1071).

local. Her narrative bears signs of significant strength, as it denies participation in the ongoing nationalistic debates on Partition. While it is possible to situate Doya's *bhadralok* family members within the nationalistic bracket of power relations, the narrator Doya is a layered persona best identified within the coordinates of her ancestral village Dighpait.

According to Anasua Basu Roychaudhury's research, refugees, especially in the camp conditions, mostly used shared memory as a powerful device for etching out a personhood that the State had denied them.¹³² In other instances, however, memory is also used as a means of cutting off from the East Bengali past. The latter situation is observable in the case of Basu Roychaudhury's interviewee Nonigopal *babu*, who proclaims "Our *desh* has changed," and adheres to his current address at 24 Paraganas in West Bengal. His purposeful withdrawal from the former Self and its geo-political belonging is because the native land had failed to sustain him and his kin. His nostalgic remembrance of the sacred homeland has been embittered by memories of riots, and therefore cannot be integrated alongside the sublime imagination that *bhadralok* immigrants limn in their artwork pertaining to "*desh*." By consciously detaching from the past, Nonigopal *babu*'s individualized memory disrupts the selective positive affect used in

¹³² In many cases, such acts of memorizing manipulate fictive accounts of material abundance and violence, in order to counter one's present overwrought and poor status. In Basu Roychaudhury's words, such nostalgic narratives help "to take control of the frightening diversity and formlessness of the world" (Basu Roychaudhury, "Nostalgia of 'Desh'" 5653), by puffing up a desirable "Grand Narrative" that sutures together dissimilar experiences. The purpose of their delving into the past can be read through Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge's interpretation of nostalgia as a "predominantly positive, self-relevant, and social emotion," which is conducive in resurrecting a traumatized past (Sedikides et al. 304). According to the researchers, because nostalgia puts together the descriptions of disappointments, losses, death and separation with euphoria and triumph, progress and redemption mark the trajectory of these narratives. Moreover, historically being associated with keywords such as "warm," "childhood" and "old times," nostalgia's meaning is fully explored in the realm of sentimentality (304). The camp-dwelling populace's accounts of trauma depict them as marginalized victims of the state, who presently live on with an imposed identity, trying to mentally encapsulate a long-since abandoned *desh* (native land). They apply their imagination to retaliate at the heart of the religiously conjured Indian nation-state – another fictive constitution in its own, and thus challenge the history of their own enforced relocation.

bhadralok's nostalgic exercises, shifting from the realm of ideal to the grids of real.¹³³ This kind of personalized meaning of migration outside of the rhetorical refugee memorialization fails to augment the key cause of nostalgic memory-construction by the refugee community in West Bengal.

Doya's individualized narrative is similar to that of Nonigopal *babu*, as it does not submit to the one-dimensional goal of utilizing past retentions for elevating self-esteem and fostering social connectedness, or of treating memory as a foil against existential threat (Sedikides et al. 307). Although the main purposes of nostalgia may seem to have persuaded Doya's memorial writing, one should remember that she never could, and indeed never attempted to seal the distance between Doyamoyee and Sunanda.¹³⁴ Moreover, she was not propelled to write about her past based on a preset thought-process that often explains nostalgic writings on Partition. Instead, she was enthused by a sudden train of thoughts, upon receiving the news of her childhood caretaker Majam Sheikh's death.¹³⁵ As a final point, she cannot unbridle

¹³³ Nonigopal *babu*'s specific context can be defined in terms of Ngai's ideas of "trajectories of repulsion" and "phobic strivings" of "away from" rather than "philic strivings" of "toward" (*Ugly Feelings* 11). It involves processes of "aversion," "exclusion" and "negation" (12).

¹³⁴ In my reading, between Doya the narrator and Sunanda Sikdar the author exists a lapse comparable to what Ranajit Guha would call a subaltern-elite or master-slave dialogue. Sikdar is a completed formation of *bhadramahila*, who acts as a buffer for Doya and Dighpait. According to Spivak, the regional or local dominant individuals are the "buffer groups," who act as liaisons between the people and the macrostructural bodies. When a buffer-class writer speaks, there is a gap, as the writer is impeded from extending her own social being's interest. Irreconcilability is thus a precondition of the buffer groups with respect to subject and desire, desire and interest, language and action (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 284-285). When applied to Sikdar, her linguistic, geographical and socio-cultural distance from childhood episodes disqualifies her from direct intervention. In the current times, she is an elite mouthpiece of Dighpait. Her only way of reproducing the past memories is through Doya's agency. The reliability of such act of remembrance is thereby balanced on Sikdar's conscious aloofness in the process of representation.

¹³⁵ The opening chapter "Dadar Katha" ("Dada's Tale") mentions the unnatural silence to which Sikdar had subjected herself till she received the news of Majam's death. She had consciously repressed her memories of East Pakistan, in the process of outwardly blending in with the West Bengal society. To extract herself from the past, she had completely disengaged herself from the post-Partition official news and unofficial rumors on the topics of

all the psychological reservations through her act of writing. For example, there is no vivid description of emotional outbursts at the point she and her Maa prepare to migrate to India. Maa actually witnesses the dismantling of her paternal house before her eyes, as in her presence, all the furniture and even parts of the house are sold, and she is literally left to stay back in the skeleton of her home. For a woman who has spent an entire life taking care of the household, Maa's preparation for departure begins with the difficult recognition that her everyday domestic objects need to be sorted out in terms of "useful" and "not useful" – some of them to be taken to India, whereas others to be abandoned (134). Even as Doya recounts the entire village having assembled in their courtyard to bid them farewell and crying (134-135), Maa and her own pathos is not narrated. All that Sikdar says is that the cooked rice remains untouched, as no one is able to eat. In the mutual pact of silence tacitly agreed between Maa and Doya on the topic of Dighpait, after they had quit their *desh* forever (135), a minimized expression of trauma maximizes the solidity of pain.

Doyamoyee's *Katha* – A Pre-Modern Paradigm

The term "Katha" in the title of *Doyamoyeeer Katha* can be literally interpreted as "tale" or "words" verbalized by the narrator Doyamoyee. Nonetheless, as a "tale" that is narrated within the cultural-geographical settings of East Pakistan, formerly a part of the undivided Indian subcontinent, it also qualifies for assessment in relation to the Sanskrit literary genre by the same name. Coined for the first time by Bhāmaha, *Kathā* refers to the *kalpanik* or "...more or less the nature of a fiction, an uninterrupted story or narrative, where the narrator should be some person other than the hero" (Sushil Kumar De 512). While it can sometimes be autobiographical,

Pakistan and East Bengal. The convalescence of her pre-Partition memories occurring at a much later stage implies that her exercise of remembering and writing is not related to amassing of power by trading refugee sentiments.

Kathā's uniqueness remains in the author's creative intervention and improvisation, rather than loyalty to any *itihāsa*.¹³⁶ Because imagination meddles with fact, there is a constant playing with the *pralabdhartha* or actual meaning. As can be deduced from Subandhu's *Vāsavadatta*, a masterpiece *kathā* literature, this genre celebrates love and peace as the two prevailing sentiments. On the other hand, the direct opposite of *kathā* is *ākhyāyikā*, a literary composition informed by *itihāsa*, and on which imagination is hard to bear. *Akhyāyikā* professes to unfold the life history of royal personages through veracity of eye-witnessed accounts. In *ākhyāyikā*, since the hero himself is the narrator, the story is told in first person and his version becomes equivalent to *pralabdhartha* or the actual meaning. Whereas *kathā* could be written both in Sanskrit and Apabhramsa, *ākhyāyikā* maintains a puritan loyalty towards Sanskrit, also called the "language of the gods," which was monopolized by the kings and the upper-castes. Finally, the essential components of *ākhyāyikā* are the themes of *kanyā-haraṇa* or abduction of a girl, *samgrāma* or war, *vipralambha* or separation, and *udaya* or the final triumph.¹³⁷ Based on this information, I analyse how some features of Doya's narration can be revisited through *kathā*'s literary techniques, and in turn, how the official historiography largely takes after *ākhyāyikā* style of narration.

First, even as Doyamoyee's narrative advances in a diegetic mode, where an omniscient narrator gives the details about episodes and characters, in terms of language, it is neither authoritative nor a receptacle of elite, polished expressions. It performs, instead, similar to the

¹³⁶ Though there is a common fallacy that *itihāsa* in Sanskrit corresponds to the originally Western concept of history, its literal Sanskrit meaning is "thus was a tradition." In that sense, it is exempted from the definitive monopoly of facts and instead bases its authenticity on people's belief in a particular tradition. This qualifies *Ramayana* as an *itihāsa* because the Hindus believe in the actual existence of Rama, regardless of his life-story's being a tested truth.

¹³⁷ I am indebted to Ipshita Chanda's class lecture notes delivered in Jadavpur University, Kolkata, for a better understanding of the concept of *kathā* and *ākhyāyikā*.

social function of Apabhramsa, a language mainly used in India in the pre-modern times among Dalits and the women. This is evidenced in the heteroglossic texture of the memoir, which embraces men and women, “*bhadra*” and “non-*bhadra*,” Hindu and Muslims’ perspectives equally. Moreover, Doya relates to a cosmos where the principal basis of interaction is between human and nature, and thus, like *kathā*, a spiritual thread of affection and compassion runs all over the narrative. Further, like *kathā*, Doya’s narrative develops through active human intervention and their consensus about facts, rather than by imposing bare history itself. Compared to Doya’s records that are dependent on unreliable childhood memory, the nation-building history, like *ākhyāyikā*, is seeker of a grand “Truth.”¹³⁸ Doya’s narrative is truth-like even though it withdraws from the tendency of merely recollecting historical accounts, dwelling more in the inconsequential everyday than in fixed dates. In this act, the village Dighpait, rather than any human being, becomes the protagonist and the key motif of the “tale,” limned through Doya’s “eye.” The open-endedness of *Doyamoyeer Kathā* is not expectant of any perfect evolution and climax, as is anticipated in *ākhyāyikā*, whose graphic formulation of woman-centric contest between two male parties fits the Partition logic of communal rivalry due to humiliation of “mothers,” “sisters” and “daughters.” Read this way, Doya’s narrative carries many remnants from the ancient genre of *kathā* in terms of literary style.

It is also vital to understand why *Doyamoyeer Katha* cannot be compared to the modern genres largely prevalent in the Western literary traditions. Anna Bernard’s study determines fragmented narrative and bildungsroman as the two genres that “critically replicate the process

¹³⁸ Doya’s mode of narration, in which description prevails over interpretation, draws on Deleuze’s statement: “there is no more representation; there’s nothing but action” (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 275) Her remembrance develops between “state formation and law” and “subject predication,” and her narratorial voice echoes the speaking, acting and struggling body discussed in Foucault-Deleuze debate. Such a voice is therefore always a multiplicity that cannot be aptly embodied in a singular theorizing intellectual.

through which the event of partition is memorialized” (Bernard 10). In them, she sees the potential of creating a “counterfactual” representation, both of the pre-Partition past and the post-Partition present.¹³⁹ However, unlike bildungsroman, Doyamoyee is not actually telling the story of a passage, and there is no maturation of her narrative towards a climactic moment of the family’s migration to India.¹⁴⁰ The random events she recalls do not justify either linearity or non-linearity, and cannot be studied as a fragmented narration. This is because while disarraying the sequence, a fragmented narrative still has a beginning, a middle and an end. Contrarily, Doya’s account can be seen as cyclic, whose beginning and end are controlled by Sunanda Sikdar in a Calcuttan time-space, whereas the middle is occupied by Doya’s informal musings. Additionally, Doya is not liable to the kind of “dissensual” or “counterfactual” storytelling that defines Biswas and Byapari’s position as a group opposed to the *bhadralok* modes of existence and identity. Being a peculiar exception to the concept of *bhadramahila* in terms of her opinions

¹³⁹ Here, by “counterfactual,” Bernard follows the definition of “critical counterfactualism” as posited by Crystal Bartolovich: “reclaiming of still incomplete revolutionary projects” (Bartolovich 64, quoted in Bernard 11). According to Bartolovich’s perspective, both the inevitability and the necessity of partition are challenged in the view of the parallel social and political organizations that could emerge (Bernard 11). What Bernard explains by bildungsroman in the context of *Midnight’s Children*: “...a coming of age as an awareness of the legacy of partition,” and later, describing the genre as pessimistic because “...the dystopia of the present seems extremely difficult to overcome” (Bernard 18), and also because the irretrievable pre-lapsarian age is disillusioned by the post-Partition future, resonate with both Biswas and Byapari’s mode of writings. In fact, these grassroots authorship subscribe more to what Joseph Slaughter calls “dissensual Bildungsroman,” a genre protesting the protagonist’s exclusion from “public realm of rights” through “drawing on the norms of this realm to articulate her or his claim” (Bernard 181-182). The idea of bildungsroman as a semi-autobiographical account, in which “...the nostalgia for that time of innocence is constitutively anti-partitionist, and so it holds onto the possibility of a different kind of future” (Bernard 18) also applies to both the Dalit refugees’ deepening consciousness of enforced evacuation, as well as their ensuing pressing urge to overturn and provoke the current state of affairs.

¹⁴⁰ In this sense, her journey is close to Victor Turner’s concept of modern anthropology, which focuses on the uncertainties of transition or in-betweenness, making the goal of assimilation into the social structure as inconsequential. This transitional phase is a moment of “reflexivity,” during which “Individuals (as well as the society itself) may be moved to the edge of profound self-investigation and exploration; social categories are played with, inverted, suspended; social borders are liquidated, crossed, blurred; identity symbols are stripped away and affixed anew” (Parrinder 10). While this transitional phase is not unfamiliar to the aforementioned Dalit intellectuals, their difference with Sikdar is that they attempt to engage in some sort of a dialogue with the mainstream society, whereas Sikdar’s sense of trauma is understated.

and philosophy of life, and a gender-converse to the Dalit male (“*chhotolok*”), Doya the narrator is an epitome of counter-mapping. She assumes the role of telling an unrehearsed version of her childhood everyday life, which does not always overlay with contemporary political facts. Born in an elite family, literacy is an easy facility for her when compared to the Dalit people; consequently, she is not using her pen solely as a device of protest.

What comes as strikingly odd in her village Dighpait is the crumbling down of the foundation of a micro society, without any allusion to histrionic communal episodes that could foresee the Hindu’s flight. The trauma pertaining to Partition and migration in Doya’s narrative is, thus, not concentrated in the single incident of her own departure from Dighpait, but is inextricably scattered throughout her juvenile consciousness, in the form of passive empathy and shock. Her adopting the pre-modern *kathā* mode of narration can be read as a resistance towards each and every rationale that nationalist history tried to construct around the events of Partition. Yet she does not claim an alternate authentic voice. Her way of unfolding the narrative is as tell-tale as Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar’s fables, which, she asserts, have been adapted from the oral folklore motifs of Dighpait (65). Just as the reader cannot be sure about the origin of these folklores, Doya’s *kathā* too maintains vagueness with respect to definitive historical records.

The epicenter of pain in Doya’s memoir lies in the awareness that a historic upheaval like Partition could be allowed to become a customary happening.¹⁴¹ Rather than her own

¹⁴¹ Even though Sadaat Hasan Manto and Sunanda Sikdar deal with two different literary genres, at this point, Doya’s narrative achieves Manto’s extremely sensitive design in the short story “Jelly.” “Jelly” contains only the temporal slot that it takes for blood, an upshot of adult violence, to take the shape of jelly, a child’s misinformed perception. This manifestation of mortal perversity combines the child’s joy in what he fathoms to be jelly with the grown-up’s realization of it to be a clot of blood. Here the spectatorship and hence the responsibility of tragedy has been carried on to the level of juvenile sensibility that, through its joyful misconception, amplifies the macabre vision. As Partition scholars observe, women and children have time and again been rendered a sub-human infantile status by the paternalistic State. Hence incorporation of a child Other’s perspective unnerves the monopoly of the nationalistic rhetoric on Partition, by including the non-adult, who also cohabits within the same

crossover experience, it is the unspoken pain of the Bengali Hindu and the Bihari Muslim families quitting their homes that grips the narrative throughout, despite its tone of normalcy. Incidents attesting to the villagers' acceptance of the fact that the Hindu neighbours will ultimately have to go, is scattered all throughout the account. For example, while reflecting how destiny leads a woman into prostitution, Doya unpreparedly thinks that it is her destiny that she will never taste the fruit of the youngest coconut tree in her courtyard (133). In another context, Maa does not haggle while selling jute and Paikar *saheb*, too, ensures her that he will not cheat her in this "last year" (123). When Ratkandu *da* shyly walks away with their brass bucket, Doya asks Maa to let him take it because they will, in any case, have to move to Hindusthan after a few days, so it will be of more use to him (61). "The inevitable" is, thus, dreaded silently, and plagues one's mind even amid mundane chores. As their day of departure nears, they distribute their cattle among neighbours. While Maa makes *Sankranti pitha*¹⁴² for all close associates, Doya cannot forgo the thought that they will have to leave without meeting so many people for the last time – the salesman and the transvestite (*bahurupi*), who used to come only in monsoons, or without seeing the growth of so many saplings that Maa had recently sown (133-134). The name of this concluding chapter, "Akrur-Sambad" ("Krishna's Departure with Akrur"), reminds of the last chapter in *Pather Panchali* by the same name, which, as Sunil Kumar Chattopadhyay states, "signals the death of Apu's childhood dreams and the stirrings of his dreams of a larger life" (*Bibhutibhushan* 42). The bovine and humdrum life of Dighpait, in the midst of which operations "from above" are carried out, as is understood by the Hindu's departure to Hindustan

territory. The minimal language of innocent perplexity upon seeing "jelly" on the road becomes a personalized emotion of the child, which is fundamentally cut off from the on-going animosities of Partition.

¹⁴² It is a Bengali custom to make *pitha* (patty, made mainly with rice flour and date-jaggery) on the last day of the Bengali month of *Poush* (usually on January 14 or 15). The festival is called *Poush Sankranti* or *Makar Sankranti*.

and the refugee Muslim's arrival to Pakistan, is the most disturbing part of this memoir. Even without the mention of a single bloodshed with respect to Partition, an entire village's mode of living is coercively made to change forever and adjust according to the maneuvers of an almost intangible and erratic history.

Defining Rural Identity at Different Levels

In *Doyamoyeer Katha*, the meaning of Other firstly sets in through the gap between writer Sunanda Sikdar and her childhood persona Doyamoyee, who narrates the episodes. As the incidents of Dighpait are physically lived by Doyamoyee but their documentation is completed by Sikdar afterwards, the memoir is formed through an unresolved negotiation between haphazard juvenile remembrances and an adult *bhadramahila*'s¹⁴³ consciousness. Born of elite Calcutta-based parents but raised until a certain age in the village, no single social designation can contain Doyamoyee's total identity. While the author Sunanda Sikdar is an educated, upper-class woman bearing signs of "refinement," the narrator Doya cannot be dissociated from her multifarious village culture. The phase of life she spends in Dighpait is, to an extent, outside the ambit of *bhadramahila* set of rules, as it is fundamentally freed from the *bhadralok*'s control. During this time, Doya's familial and social sensibilities are not greatly cut back through tight gendered restrictions. She describes growing up in her paternal aunt's custody, who was widowed at a very young age and whose sole passion was centered on farming, and under the supervision of her Muslim peasant caretaker Majam. As a widow and a poor *rayat* (landless farmhand), both these guardians in different ways occupied marginal positions in the village society. Hence Doyamoyee's self-awareness is predominantly made up of her peasant state of

¹⁴³ For details on the term *bhadramahila* and its history, see Introduction of the thesis.

existence, rather than her upper-caste Hindu identity or her gendered orientation viz-a-viz middle-class femininity.¹⁴⁴

The widowed aunt whom Doya calls “Maa,” and who deeply influences Doya’s character, often subverts the class, caste, communal and gendered notions of *bhadramahila*-hood. Maa’s way of thinking is close to Kollontai’s explanation of proletariat women in the Russian context, who asserted themselves as workers equal to men, even before the idea of gendered rights had come to forefront in an organized fashion (Kollontai 206). Kollontai notes that the singular notion of “Feminism” does not take into account the exploitation of proletariat women by their bourgeois-born sisters. Each of these two group’s diverse class-based interest inhibits the possibility of a gender-based unified movement.

Born in the *bhadralok* class but herself not educated, Maa’s motivation for educating the non-*bhadralok* villagers is tantamount to crossing the threshold that would otherwise define her as a compliant *bhadramahila*. Yet, she does not function from within the expectations of elite Calcuttan feminists, who had first introduced the liberal idea of women’s exclusive space in Bengal, by starting *mahila samitis* (Chatterjee, “The Bengali Bhadramahila” 29). While these urban women’s groups at one level contended for a parallel feminist *swaraj* (self-rule) during India’s independence, thereby emphasizing female education in order to facilitate women’s self-sufficiency, at another, they frequently relapsed to conventional feminine roles. They stressed the

¹⁴⁴ According to B  teille, middle-class-ness is reproduced through a combination of education, occupation and financial circumstances into which children are socialized within the family. Among the Bengalis, the middle-class faction is united not only in their appreciation for educational achievements as expressed in a consented set of practices, but also in terms of employment and marital prospects that such achievements will help to flourish. The cultural ideas of gender and personhood are conceived in terms of reproductive process, and producing and nurturing of children seen as a central determining feature of human life in Bengal. Because mothers from middle-class families are socially appointed as the first pre-school educator with respect to this highly emphasized duty of child-rearing, Doya’s preliminary tutelage under her surrogate guardian, “Maa,” is momentous in shaping her adult sense of Self. For more, see Donner, “Education and the Making of Middle-class Mothers.”

importance of traditional “feminine tasks” in the political arena, willing to be recognized as “mothers,” “daughters” and “sisters,” rather than individual female citizen subjects.

For example, women’s working and becoming martyrs for the Gandhian movements in the 1930s and 1940s created irresistible heroic thrusts based on gendered advancement. However, they hardly challenged the prevalent picture of Hindu sisterhood or women’s co-authorship in the making of a patriarchal Hinduized nation.¹⁴⁵ In the liaison formed between Congress and *mahila samitis*, the *samiti* women would exalt the convicted Congressmen with Hindu sacrosanct items like parched rice, sandalwood paste and paddy rice. Such items and gestures proclaimed a negation of non-Hindu religiosity or the non-Hindu’s role in the nationalist struggle, suggesting that the free Indian state would uphold only a specific religious colour.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ila Mitra, an enlisted member of the Communist Party, who participated in the Tebhaga Movement (1946) and volunteered in the Mahila Atmaraksha Samity (1943) to free women and propagate their service to the masses, mention that she wanted to lead a “peaceful family life” but was forced into the “arena of history” to emancipate human kind, “half of which are women” (Mitra 52). Her political and feminist perspectives appear to be an extension of the engendered domestic roles, which often explained Communist feminism in Bengal. Moreover, like Doya’s Maa, she also symbolizes, in Kavita Panjabi’s words, a “contradictory layering of self.” Mitra was at the same time a comrade and co-sufferer in the Santhals’ Nachol insurgency and yet, as the latter called her “Ranima” (literally: mother queen), her virtual unity with them neither declassified her from her *zamindari* background, nor removed her from the “paternal” structures of feudalism (Panjabi 55), but made her a unique figure among the Santhals. Furthermore, while Mitra was very popular among the Muslim peasants, her torture in the hands of state guardians in the wake of Tebhaga insurgency produced her body as “ground for the newly emergent nation state’s confrontation with multiple forces, communist, Santal and Hindu, all of which extended across the borders of the nation and were perceived simultaneously as an internal as well as an external threat to its “integrity”” (54).

¹⁴⁶ The analogy of primal nature and female body in bearing attributes of pacifism, preservation and motherhood is an available vision of the Gandhian secular philosophy, which valorizes traditional qualities of sacrifice and care in a woman. On the other hand, the 19 C Indian nationalists held essentially propagandist views, seeing reflections of militant Hindu goddesses Durga and Kali in the possible formations of *viranganas* (heroic women warriors). These propagandas aimed to mobilize women’s participation within the national-communal icon of the Bharat-Mata (Mother India). The Hindutva movement symbolized around the figure of the combative Mother is, according to Spivak, a “reverse ethnocentric narrativization” (Parry, “Problems in Current Theories” 45), which organizes aggressive Hindu female volunteers to shape the revivalist movements based on Shakti ideology. Xenophobic rhetoric of Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati, VHP and BJP leaders respectively, who proclaim themselves to be female Hindu ascetics (*sanyasin*), and their active involvement in the Bombay and Surat riots further corroborate the successful marketing of Hindutva dogmatism among women. In Flavia Agnes’ view, in the Hindu religious practices’ and symbols’ becoming unquestioned secular norms of the Indian political state lie the desire to alienate women from the minority communities (Rajan, “Is Hindu Goddess a Feminist?” WS-37). It, therefore, does not come as a surprise that the first feminist press in India has a Hindu logo – “Kali for Women.” In the mid-1970s,

Further, by way of aiding women across class and community, such as arranging marriages for widows or extending midwifery services to pregnant Dalit females, the *samiti*-defined model of womanhood reinscribed the distinction between Self and Other.¹⁴⁷ The Self became the universal and supreme sympathizer doling out help to the Other, whereas the Other was deemed unequal and hence a supplicant of this Self's support. In Maa's geographical and cultural remoteness from this kind of feminism, she is a misfit with the newly invented pockets of gentlewomanhood. Her sense of community is delineated neither by the pro-feminine nor the pro-nationalist dynamics, but through visualizing the territory of her own village Dighpait as a naturally irreducible and unchangeable unit. By this, I refer to Maa's belief in the mixed configuration of the Dighpait populace, prior to total exchange of population on the lines of community. Initially she dislikes the immigrant Bihari Muslims, as they seem to her as destabilizers of the pre-Partition harmonious balance of the village. On the other hand, she is deeply attached to the Bengali Muslims and sees them as natural owners of the village land, calling them as *bhumiputras* or the "sons of the soil."

indigenous feminist movements that were mainly initiated by the urban middle-class professional women invoked Hindu symbols, with the view of countering the feminist philosophy's Western bias. For example, Madhu Kishwar, editor of *Manushi*, dissociated herself from the feminist identity, instead looking into "own cultural traditions" to "identify their points of strength and use them creatively in combating reactionary and anti-woman ideas." Women groups represented by Kishwar drew their indigenous knowledge from discursive sources including literatures by women Bhakti poets, negotiations with religious practices like austerity, goddess cults, spirit possession, etc., in order to challenge the shortfalls of Western philosophies (Kishwar and Vanita 47, quoted in Rajan WS-36). In contrast, it has always been the radical leftist tendency to seize religion's monopoly from the right wing practitioners, exploiting the pluralist performances for the benefit of progressive purposes (Sunder Rajan WS-38).

¹⁴⁷ I refer to the concept of Self and Other in their existential sense. I especially find Edmund Husserl's view of Self trying to derive Other's subjectivity from one's own and being limited by transcendental ego, and thereby not being able to appraise the Other's distinct ego, to be useful. It not only demonstrates the *bhadralok-chhotolok* relationship, but also how the heretical *bhadramahila*, even at her egalitarian best, is inhibited by the awareness of her hierarchical self-identity. Moreover, Jean Paul Sartre's concept that through objectification of one's own ego, the Other's subjectivity and *a priori* existence is established, can be applied in understanding Doya's narratorial person.

At this stage, it is important to note that the *bhadralok* too undergoes noticeable transformation in the pre-Partition decades, especially since the early 20th century, as his onus shifts from property to education. While the *bhadralok* usually acquired education to assert their difference from the non-*bhadralok*, Maa's brother (Doya's father) works towards educating the villagers, irrespective of their class, caste or community, seeing the village as a local self-complete body that needs to be overall developed.¹⁴⁸ However, his city-bred suave empathy for the subalterns is a world apart from Maa's sensitivity towards these same people. In comparison to her *bhadralok* brother, Maa's simultaneous observation of untouchability while feeling one with the non-*bhadralok* subjects reflects a different sense of social consciousness, which cannot be understood in terms of urban values and relationships.¹⁴⁹

The sub-conscious and naturalized form of discrimination that Maa exercises in her mundane dealings with the Muslim and Dalit peasantry can be recognized in Hasan Azizul Huq's

¹⁴⁸ According to Sumit Sarkar, the three defining elements that separated a *bhadralok* from others is his access to education, printing culture and job (Batabyal, "Who the 'Bhadralok' Was?" 3835). Western education being a colonial enterprise, the upper- and middle-class *bhadralok* joined in complicity with the colonial rulers in preventing democratization of education. Being anxious of losing their distinctiveness, the upper-class controlled the dissemination of print among the masses. In preserving education thus, they acted as detractors of subaltern literacy. Doya's father differs from this traditional outlook of the *bhadralok*, as he focuses on the unit of village over the unit of class, in defining his sense of Self. A similar figure like Doya's father is Birendranath Chattopadhyay, author of *Delirium*, who could not be affiliated to any political organization, and was looked up to as a leading figure of neighbourhood by the working-class Hindus and Muslims. He practiced medicine and lived in a slum of Alam bazar, North Calcutta, involving himself in voluntary social work (Chatterjee, "On Religious and Linguistic Nationalisms"). Doya's father can also be compared to the Brahmo pioneers like Rammohun Ray, Debendranath Thakur and Keshab Chandra Sen, who were the first to propagate the need for women's education in the 19 C and faced social ostracism. It is important to remember, however, that not all Brahmos could rid themselves of the *bhadralok* and Hinduist thoughts, such as Debendranath's reservation against inter-caste marriages and women's participation in congregations, which had resulted in a splitting of the Samaj between the Adi (Original) and the Naba Bidhan (New Dispensation) groups (Karlekar, "Views on Women and Their Roles" 83).

¹⁴⁹ In Grossberg's words, "People are never only Black or female or working-class; people's identities are defined precisely by the complex articulations between their different positions in a variety of systems of social difference" (Grossberg 99). Similar to Grossberg's refusal to see daily life as only an autonomous body that exudes empowerment and resistance (95), and instead identifying it through an intersectional relationship with social structures and popular culture, Maa's association with her neighbours chalk up an unguaranteed "messy terrain" (ibid.).

article “Kromagoto Atmakhandan” (“Constant Degeneration of Self” in *Deshbhag: Binash O Binirman*). Huq describes his experience of living in a Hindu-majority village during the pre- and post-Partition decades, particularly remembering his marginalized status as this area becomes part of West Bengal. He observes that a socially inveterate communal sentiment, which is by and large immune to open assaults, is fundamentally different from calculated pogroms and riots, which are pre-organized by major leaders and involve economic and physical capital. The isolated incidents of religious prejudices that occur in one’s everyday experience are outcomes of a pathological condition of hatred towards the Other. This hatred is inter-generationally fed, first at the level of family and then on a macrocosmic scale, by instilling anxiety and fear with the help of myths about the Other community. On the other hand, a riot, by virtue of its characteristic disorder, is a moment for realization of individual goals within the guise of collectivity.¹⁵⁰ The easiest way for the elitist politics of the nation-state to obscure its own involvement in these riots is by prolonging hate stories at the bosom of each group about the other. Subsequently, the personal motives inciting crimes in such pogroms are given religious, caste, class or ethnic meanings.

Bengal, at different junctures in history, has witnessed different forms of groupism – the share-croppers against the upper-class Hindu *zamindars* and Muslim elites, the Dalit Hindus

¹⁵⁰ Debesh Roy explains how individual latent motives function actively within the collective nature of a riot. According to him, it is irrelevant as to who starts a riot; rather, what counts are the numerous seemingly unrelated individuals, who benefit from the chaotic atmosphere. It is ironical that riot diffuses the identity of the committers and the sponsors, passing a man-made massacre for an unforeseeable upheaval, whereas the same crimes – theft, arson, molestation, murder – when committed at individual levels, are disposed to juridical verdicts. Riot can only be countered with police action but not taken to the court of law. It is different from the general group crimes, where individuals are tried for their specific transgressions. The fact that: “the same perpetrations, when committed from within the organized violence such as riot, are no longer considered a case to be trialed at court...to check it, the police may arrest, but nothing more than that. The legal system can only arbitrate circumstances where the precise offense is identifiable. There is no such penal code that punishes the collective wrongdoing of a group, a society, a community, a state or an ethnic people” (Roy 887, translation mine), goes on to point out the complicity of the largest such imagined group – the nation state – in programming and leading on political futures out of disciplined commotions.

against the *bhadralok*, the *gwala* (milkman) community against both Hindus and Muslims. Yet out of all sorts of heterogeneity, the communal divide had never before loomed as such an exceptionally undefeatable problem, which could upset the harmony of shared life and living, and ultimately precipitate the greatest exodus of the century. Huq observes:

For the interest of living, for the interest of earning, communalism ought to take a back-seat. Landless Hindu-Muslims, share-cropper Hindu-Muslims, proletarian Hindu-Muslims, owners of five or ten *bighas* and small-household Hindu-Muslims, have timelessly coexisted. Even if there have been communal differences, they have lived with that and commendably (“Kromagoto” 133, translation mine).

Much like Doya’s Maa who would spontaneously practice Untouchability without even imagining to hate Dalits or Muslims, Huq comes across Hindu teachers, colleagues and friends, who are all at once extremely discourteous, albeit at times without realizing, and also very loving and protective towards him. Maa then belongs to the same position as Huq’s Sanskrit teacher who would proudly encourage Huq’s diligence without ever touching his pencil, the Hindu family friends who would pour him tea in a separate cup, or the scholarly man in the village who, upon seeing Huq’s interest in Saraswati Puja plannings, would affectionately call him a “cursed Muslim who definitely was a Brahmin in his previous birth” (126, translation mine). Huq deduces that the hatred and the love were both as genuine as the other. While such conservative individuals hardly fermented the Partition riots, they exhibited a marked social handicap in breaking hackneyed social customs. Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us that values, when conflated with biases, may render a one-sided deafness that can be potentially dangerous owing to its indiscretion, in times of crisis (“Remembered Villages” 2151).

Grossberg’s notion of power organization through social differences around identities of gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, nationality, etc. (98) helps to understand the humanity of Dighpait, which is founded on numerous pockets of differential relations. Each level of social

order maintains hierarchy. Factors based on the sameness of language, religion and ethnicity, besides uniformity in economic status, help to bind one group and create an identity fold by defining their difference from the Other. However, there is no absolute sense of Self and Other in the narrative, as they emerge in relative terms and comparative degrees of disparity and sameness. For example, while Hindus and Muslims, Dalits and upper-castes, or natives and immigrants are the starting points of these social binaries, the complexity arises when refugees, a necessarily heterogeneous group, make new connections and groupings in the migrated land. Doya's initial ideas about refugees are shaped by her Maa's resentment towards the newly infiltrating Bihari Muslims. Ironically, Doya learns the new word "refugee" from its distorted colloquial pronunciation ("ripuchi"), rendering its meaning as being different from its original one, yet one that is contextually appropriate:

I guessed what ripuchi might mean. *Ripu* means one's enemy. Reading of *Ramayana* made me aware that Ram and Ravana are each other's *ripu*. I understood that Samsher-chacha and his family were my Ma's *ripus* (Chakravarty n.p.).

This simplistic perspective of the pan-national crisis coming from a child's enquiry on *Ramayana*, changes afterwards with the awareness that "refugee" is not a unified identity marker outside of one's class brackets: "And Doya realizes soon enough that if any ripuchi-chacha brings money, can read and write, talk his way through, he can ensure his rights to the jungle and deal in timbres" (Chakravarty n.p.).¹⁵¹ Thus, she subsequently also realizes that Maa's antipathy does not apply uniformly to refugees from all backgrounds.

¹⁵¹ Richard M Eaton studies the pre-colonial sub-divisions existing in the Indian Muslim identity. Besides class stratifications, Muslims in Bengal under the Sultans (13 C) had begun to practice caste-like social discriminations. Divisions of *ashrafs* and *non-ashrafs* had become prominent between 13 C and 16 C. In a comprehensive Bengali society, there were sixteen artisan groups of Muslims besides the Hindus, and inter-caste marriage was considered a stigma like among the Hindus. This history of hierarchies had been expunged by Jinnah, to realize his goal of the "Two-Nation Theory" solely on the basis of religion. Nevertheless, as is evident in Doya's narration, the misbalance

How the rural values of Self and Other disprove the “high-politics”-engendered logic of Partition, is realized in the layered sense of community life in Dighpait. By mentioning that the Hindus of the village prefer to stay with the native Bengali Muslims rather than the refugee Bihari Muslims or the West Bengali Hindus, with whom they are distant in terms of linguistic and cultural habits, the author lays emphasis on a particular state of peaceful coexistence. Yet, because such bondings are not insulated from but rather exist over and above everyday neighborhood quarrels, they complicate the “pure” imaginations about village life as evoked in nostalgic immigrant narratives. Sikdar describes the collaged faith that her villagers practiced, such as by appeasing the local natural resources, as in the case of their paying adulation to *Padmadevi* (River Padma), or the Muslim shaman’s reciting *Lokhinder* and *Behula*’s folklore and invoking Goddess *Manasha*¹⁵² to cure snake-bites. These practices pulled the people

of social privileges and material rights could not be evened out among the Muslims, even after the realization of Pakistan (Dasgupta, “On the Margins: Muslims in West Bengal”).

¹⁵² According to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, as opposed to the patriarchal godhead in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Vedic Hinduism’s female deities call for a matriarchal worldview. However, the Hindu goddess is produced through feminization of positive attributes, such as righteousness, justice, wealth and learning, without reflecting the actual material and historical conditions in which they are shaped. This is because ideological upgrading of the powerful female models does not correspond to the regular Indian woman’s conditions (Sunder Rajan, “Is Hindu Goddess a Feminist?” WS-35). Thus the Hindu goddess’ worship can be radicalized only by extricating her from the mainstream Brahmanical ritual-system, and making her available to the Dalits, women and non-Hindus, as well as through recognizing the spaces of alternative beliefs and practices outside of the monolithic hold of Hinduism. This calls for a plurality of tradition as opposed to any kind of compositeness of representation, which incorporates the major, the minor, the mainstream and the local, taking into consideration the entire range of diversity that these goddesses may pose (WS-37-38). Kancha Iliiah’s illustration of the non-Hindu Dalit goddess Pochamma matches the goals of this secular and democratic frame of worship: “Unlike Sita, her gender role is not specified. Nobody knows about Pochamma’s husband. Nobody considers her inferior or useless because she does not have a husband...Pochamma is independent. She does not pretend to serve any man. Her relations to human beings is gender-neutral, caste-neutral, class-neutral...She herself relates to nature, production and procreation...The people can speak with her in their own tongues;...” (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 92). In the same way, the essentially parish-generated myth of *Manasha* posits her as a localized elixir than an aggressive Hindu deity; in the folklore, she emerges with stark anthropomorphic traits like jealousy and revenge, vying with the mortal Chand Sadagar. Here, it is important to clarify that local interventions and multiple literary renditions of the Hindu *Puranas* and *Mangalkavyas*, as well as the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, have rendered these texts with additive qualities and opened them to manifold interpretations. Thus, Doya’s understanding of *Manasha* is closer to the goddess Pochamma as she emerges in Iliiah’s description, who does not downplay the possible alliance of Dalits and *bhadra* women, or Hindus and Muslims, within the diversified milieu of Dighpait. Such local “small” goddesses, according

together from both the communities under commonsensical wise-sayings that serve as mechanisms of survival, against the perilous and marshy landscape. So, when Maa implements bigotry towards her neighbors from a rural feminine perspective, such as forbidding Doya from eating at a Muslim or a Dalit's house, or by not offering a communal or caste "outsider" to sit in her house, she does not automatically second the discriminatory Nation Politic. Instead, she acts as a cog of the traditional notions of "pure" and "impure," which she has inherited and which have waxed within her through uncritical engagement with the institution of Hinduism. Her attitude towards the Hindu community's "outsiders" clearly draws on feudalist social relationships, which, as Partha Chatterjee notes:

...were bound by norms of reciprocity, formulated in an entire system of religious beliefs – original myths, sacred histories, legends – which laid down the principles of political ethics, and were coded into a series of acts and symbols denoting authority and obedience, benevolence and obligation, or oppression and godhead revolt ("Agrarian Relations" 18).

When Kamaal, the son of oilman Mafis *mian*, who is a "low-born" Muslim, asks Doya why she calls his father by his *mian* designation instead of as *chacha* (uncle), Doya innocently remarks that their being "people from Kolabadha" suffices her not to address them by any relation. She does not mean to slight their elders but, rather, there is an instinctive sense of caste and communal equation unthinkingly passed on from Doya's Maa onto Doya.

The layered framework of Self and Other also appears in the chapter "Shesh Mochchob" ("The Last Feast"). Doya recounts how the otherwise charitable and prosperous *borokorta* (literally: senior authority) of Chhaitani, who throws a big feast to the entire village before migrating to Cooch Bihar (India), invites all the Hindus as well as many Muslims, but

to Spivak, carry "accounts of resistance and flexibility" with respect to the "caste-bound ritualism of high-Hinduism." Many of them are rooted to aboriginal cultures prior to the arrival of the Indo-European settlers, and do not fit into the "Hindu" history "of the perfect obliteration of traces" (Spivak, "Moving Devi" 136).

deliberately leaves out the likes of Ajgar *chacha*, who was at once refugee, Muslim and poor. *Borokorta* would team up in the lumber business with the rich Muslim refugee Anar *mian*, but choose not to familiarize with Ajgar *chacha*. Such wealthy Hindus' discriminatory behaviour towards the refugee Muslims, based on latter's economic and cultural status, gives way to new circles of bonding in the immediate post-Partition decades. Rather than religious grounds, these circles are made by interest groups comprising both Hindus and Muslims, who gather around the aim of class and vocational benefits.

On the other hand, public gatherings such as wedding ceremonies retain the regressive sectarian structure. For instance, at a Hindu wedding, the bride's father Biren *kaka* makes obvious hierarchical seating arrangements while serving the banquet. The village upper-castes and close relatives sit in the indoor-courtyard and are served all kinds of delicacies; the Dalit Hindus sit in the mid-courtyard and are excluded from the treat of one of the sweetmeats; and the Muslim guests sit in the outer patio, who are altogether not served any sweets. A rigid sense of social gradation is made clear through such spatial and qualitative distinctions in hospitality. Despite being deeply offended and holding a grudge against Biren, the village *maulavi* (Muslim priest), however, does not reciprocate former's attitude. His act of blessing Biren's daughter shows that the *maulavi* reclaims her within his sense of Selfhood, as defined by their common membership within Dighpait.

In a similar way, the same Achhar *bhai*, who Maa earlier treats as an alien intrusive Other for being a Bihari, Muslim and refugee, is later accommodated by Maa, upon the arrival of some "suspicious" indigenous people into Dighpait. Achhar personally reckons them as government's spies whose ulterior motive is to steal a perfect human child and sacrifice it for the inauguration of a government-sponsored flyover. Achhar's way of warning Doya not to mix with

“those wenches,” and bizarrely, for at least as long as her ears are not pierced, may seem like another of the folklorist maxims, but upon a deeper investigation, reveals his conscious attitude towards his own identity as a male inhabitant of Dighpait.¹⁵³ Just as a given community claims its legitimate habitation within a nation through the way it has defended that terrain from external incursions, similarly here, Achhar’s cynical attitude towards the Garo indigenous people is a way of covering up his own refugee status and underlining his valid sense of belonging within the immigrated land of East Bengal.¹⁵⁴ He takes on the role of a primal male figure beyond his ascribed community or class, who is in charge of defending the territory as well as the female who belongs to this imaginary compass of Self. In the absence of her “natural” guardian or the *bhadralok*, the prospective *bhadramahila* Doya is taken as the non-*bhadralok* Achhar’s responsibility. Achhar assumes the task of policing her mingling with the tribal non-*bhadramahilas*. Because a *bhadramahila*’s class quotients are created only to define her simplistically as “the women of the *bhadralok*” (Indrani Chatterjee 26), in the latter’s absence, both the non-*bhadralok* and the *bhadramahila* lose their respective social functionalities, acting in response to a different system of domination, which involves two gendered bodies. Thus, in Achhar’s asking to quicken Doya’s ear-piercing to make her “less vulnerable” with respect to the

¹⁵³ According to the village tradition, ear-piercing marks the transition of a girl from “perfect” to “imperfect.” Based on this, I argue that the doorway into *bhadramahila*-hood is through losing the believed “correctness” that one possessed by virtue of being a girl. It is indirectly through such strict and non-changing features of, say, “correctness” and “wrongness” that the gender complementarities of *bhadralok* and *bhadramahila* are also maintained. Yet, unlike a non-*bhadralok*, not to say a non-*bhadramahila*, who are socially contrived as eternal inferiors to the *bhadralok*, a *bhadramahila*’s identity is not totally formed out of negative valences. Rather, the meaning of her existence is protean in the patriarchal society, depending on the extent of service and fidelity that she provides to her masculine identity-originator. The “type” and “anti-type” among the middle-class women characters, as they are represented in post-Partition literature and films, are pivoted to these aspects of allegiance and faithlessness.

¹⁵⁴ Balibar notes that the case of national formations are facilitated by and advanced through the image of those communities that recognize themselves as the state’s institution, and claim the state as its own in opposition to other states. These communities inscribe their political struggles within their “own” state by formulating reformist and social revolutionary projects. In turn, they help to manufacture “monopoly of organized violence” (Max Weber) and “national-popular will” (Gramsci) (Balibar, “The Nation Form” 93).

“outsider” women, there is clearly a wish to domesticate Doya’s pre-*bhadramahila* person. Ear-piercing is a pretext for commemorating Doya’s permanent membership as a female rather than a child within the socio-cultural milieu in which she is born, thereby loading her with the baggage associated with such class, communal and gender status. In contrast, the difficulty in confining Doya within any *bhadralok*-devised identity-script is realized, as she is eager to befriend the tribal wanderers. Her concern for the Garo women’s poverty and famished state goes on to show that she primarily recognizes them as poor people, who need to be given some rice, rather than only as either women or strangers.

The chapter “Amu *da*-r Doraj Dil” (“Amu *da*’s Big Heart”) marks an intersection of the space of the photograph with the East Bengali rural milieu.¹⁵⁵ While Dighpait’s population at this point is in a continuous state of flux through emigration of Hindu neighbours and immigration of Muslim families, which results in new forces of power and territorialisation, the photograph marks the village’s composite life-spirit beyond all kinds of differences. Such a photograph becomes the still spatio-temporal concentrate of a long-standing togetherness, and carries in it a memory of the scale of carnival. The photo-shooting takes place through the near-festive measures of inviting a city photographer, cooking village-wide special meal on that joy, clothing in one’s best attires before the sunset and finally appearing for the shot. The photographer being an urban Muslim, the photographed being the mixed population of Dighpait, the financer being a Hindu who would shortly emigrate to “India,” and the organizers and hosts being both the Hindu and the Muslim well-to-do households, this event then becomes an actual public *mochhob*

¹⁵⁵ According to Susan Sontag, “Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all photos of people” (Sontag, *On Photography* 70, quoted in Hirsch 5). Additionally, Hirsch notes: “It is precisely the indexical nature of the photo, its status as relic, or trace, or fetish – its “direct” connection with the material presence of the photographed person – that intensifies its status as harbinger of death and, at the same time and concomitantly, its capacity to signify life” (6). Like the photographs in Vladek Spiegelman’s *Maus*, the above mentioned photo as Doya’s post-memorial document can be read as “what has been and what has been violently destroyed” (Hirsch 9).

(festival) compared to the one organized by the aforementioned *borokorta*. It is not a mere coincidence that the *borokorta*, who was counted among the important *bhadraloks* of Dighpait, had planned a festivity by categorically eliminating the poorer Muslims, whereas Amu *da*, who would not sit well with the notion of gentility (“Amu *da* had a bit of disrepute for leading wayward life” 115), splurges single-handedly and indiscriminately for the entire village. It is as if in contempt to the high-flown rank of the *bhadraloks* like *borokorta* that the villagers posit Amu in the plinth of endearment: “Amu Nag did have a *dil* (heart), Allah gives money to so many, but how many have such a big heart? Spending so much to take the picture of his fellow villagers, the man did have some grit” (115, translation mine). The photograph thus holds within it the ethos of *bhadra* and non-*bhadra* rural masses, which wanted to stay within a single frame but was dispersed under the throttlehold of elite politics.

The “Un-stereotyped” Bengali Hindu Widow

Because Maa was widowed as a teenager, resulting in her return to the paternal home, her sense of family crystallizes at a much more discursive level compared to that of a regular *bhadramahila*. With respect to the imaginary borderlines that demarcate “home” and “non-home” and correspondingly the notions of “insider” and “outsider,” Maa is more flexible than the female members in a typical *bhadralok*’s household. In fact, the widows that the narrator remembers from her childhood exude a streak of independence, which is regardless of the gendered privileges enjoyed by the educated, earning or politically active urban *bhadramahila*. As someone who never underwent formal academic training, Maa’s tone of playful insolence towards the draconian Hindu customs for treating the widows austere, cannot be compared to the freedom that the post-Partition era had brought among urban women. For example, the mocking local-dialect rhyme made by Maa and her widowed sister-in-law is to defy the rules that

exempt Hindu widows from touching non-vegetarian food: “Is this eating or dying? For every nibble, (we) only habitually open (our) mouth” (32, translation mine). This defiance is further explained in description of their unornamented bodies: “This body, this fair body, deck it with a necklace, when this body is decrepit, support it with a stick” (73, translation mine).¹⁵⁶ Such a form of effrontery cannot be measured alongside the feminist stance posited by Doya’s *bhadramahila* mother, who was a school-teacher in Calcutta. Such colloquial expressions draw on pre-Renaissance earthy Bengali used by the non-*bhadralok*. As these widows make frequent references to and satirize the mortal body’s flaws, they underplay the romantically imagined “beautiful” human (specifically female) body that has aesthetically inspired poets like Jaydev and Bharatchandra Ray. In their subversive attitude, the widows are a breakthrough from the formulaic nationalist imagings of the vulnerable Hindu widow, who is supposed to be eternally

¹⁵⁶ The patriarchal structure of upper-caste Hindu families is settled on the ideological edifice of well-protected *bhadramahila*’s body. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar grieves the birth of the Indian females in a general misogynous environment. Similar discussions on widows are made by Kailashbashini Devi’s *Hindu Abalaganer Hinabastha*, Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay’s *Damarucharit*, and by authors such as Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Jyotirmoyee Devi and Ashapura Devi. According to the *Sanatan Hindu dharma*, *Suttee* was a practice of Shastric injunction with the view of preserving the deceased man’s widow’s chastity. On the other hand, the colonial India treated women’s marital status as a domain of personal laws, and the British legislative machinery entailed arguments modeled on Shastras and Shariat in order to bring about changes. Hence reformers like Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar argued from within the Shastras, to devise lenient laws for the Hindu widows. For example, Rammohan Roy quoted from Manu’s diktats to implement stern observance of widowhood in lieu of widow immolation, whereas Vidyasagar cited the *Parasharasamhita Sloka* to validate the suitability of widow remarriage in the *kaliyuga*. To make his argument cogent in favour of the widows, Vidyasagar had to support orthodox Hindu convictions, proposing widow remarriage as a precaution against prostitution, adultery, incest and feticide. By such statements, he shared the regressive Hindu viewpoint that marriage is the only means of maintaining purity of social order and channelizing female sexuality in a fitting manner (Bagchi, “Socializing the Girl Child in Colonial Bengal” 2214-2215). For postcolonial scholars like Spivak, mass misogyny attains an economic dimension, as the abolition of *suttee* suggests that a widow, even if son-less, is authorized to her deceased husband’s property. Further, she notes that *suttee* is ideologically cathected as a heavenly reward, which draws its ideological strength by identifying individual agency with the supraindividual, such that killing of oneself on husband’s pyre becomes a symbolic emancipation from the unfortunate hold of the female body. Thus, in the British’s collaboration with the Brahmins in abolishing *suttee*, the central discourse takes place between the “noble Hindu” and the “bad Hindu,” with the British disappearing from the scene, and the free will of the feminine sexed subject successfully effaced. What goes unnoticed is that self-immolation, rather than being an exception, is only an extreme instance of everyday gendered violence. In the wake of barbarity fanning the Partition genocide, performance of *jauhar* was rife, often with the encouragement from family patriarchs (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 306).

threatened by disgrace, molestation and harm by the Muslims, and so needs to be consigned under the paternalistic care of the State.¹⁵⁷ In the context of abduction of women during the Partition, P.K. Dutta's study reveals:

Mahesh Deb propagated widow remarriage on the grounds that their privations produced a situation where '[inability] to subdue nature g[a]ve way to temptations which beset them on every side.' This idea of the widow as a mere zone of desire was powerful enough to make her a consensual sign of sexual vulnerability. Muslim-owned newspapers, and individuals defended their community on the grounds that holocaust Hindu widows initiated these 'abductions.' Ironically, Arya Samaj propaganda confirmed this impression: a contemporary pamphlet issued by them stated that the proliferation of widows was an important reason for the degeneration of Hindus, especially because the latter could not prevent them from falling into the hands of the irreligious... We have seen, in the instance of Arya Samaj discourse, how a fear of the consequences of a widows' desire could be resolved by translating her into a victim of Muslim lust (68-69).¹⁵⁸

Amrita Basu notes that the Hindu fundamentalist political factions such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) continue to use the Hindu woman's body in constructing Hindu superiority and representing Hindus as victims, as well as in showing condescension towards the Muslims ("Hindu Women's Activism" 172). In this respect, the attitude of the widows in Doyamoyee's text ridicule the extreme

¹⁵⁷ These widows' as well as Doya's persona can be compared to Rassundari's sense of Self in her autobiography *Amar Jibon* (one of the earliest memoirs by an Indian woman, 1876). Religion or traditions do not play an excess in the construction of these widowed women's entity. Despite the fact that they are not particularly atheist or secular, there is a gap between their personal journeys and the orthodox social institutions. In fact, while Rassundari, being part of mainstream Hindu subjectivity, cannot express Vaishnavite Sringar Rasa in her documented autobiography, Doya's aunts frequently refer to erotica in their oral discourses. However, Doya and Rassundari Devi do not write from positions of rebels, and belong to a constitution of collective ethos, as influenced by indigenous medieval literary traditions, such as *panchalis* and *Mangalkavyas*.

¹⁵⁸ Dutta notes how statistical figures invalidate the Arya Samaj's mission of connecting Hindu widows with communal abduction: "The pattern of abductions analysed by the *Sanjibani* showed that, out of a total of 1,033 abductions, 45.2 per cent were married (of whom 70 per cent were Hindus), while only 12.7 per cent and 9.8 per cent were widows and unmarried, respectively. Such cases, unlike the ones concerning widows, could not be attributed to the compulsions of biological necessity. On the other hand, it was indicative of the woman's consent, precisely because her removal from marital protection clashed so completely with the accepted ideal of the subjection of the woman to her husband's being... Thus, the 'problem' of widows took into account – via the sexist fear of a woman's 'uncontrollable sexuality' when detached from the matrimonial safety valve – a woman's desires, and built a corresponding reformist project" (69, 70).

obsession that is socially created around a woman's sexual body, as is realized in the case of the rehabilitated Partition victims, who were treated by male nationalist actors as liabilities of the state.

About Maa's widowed sister-in-law, the narrator writes:

For knowledge, she did not have to depend on many books. I think hers was an innately educated mind...she was a perpetual explorer. Had been all over India. Would stay in different *ashrams* (asylums). Some people would buy food for the unfed old lady. She enjoyed making new relations in all these places...she had a lot of respect and love for the humankind. Her attitude was like, why need I bother about myself if there are so many relations on each and every wayside to take care of me?...She had eye-witnessed the riots, and was pained. But she never lost her faith in humanity (34, 35, translation mine).

Unlike the modern working *bhadramahila*, whose service to the "home" as a bread-earner would rationalize her being "outside," such a widow's "home" surpasses the margins of domesticity.

"Home" does not emerge as a site that can categorically identify her in terms of gendered duties, or enclose her as an inert, cosseted object. To her, home is rather an infinitely expanding space, which transcends the synthetic barriers of class, caste, language, community, religion or region.

This is thus a reverse journey of a single woman in comparison to her abducted riot-scathed sisters. While the latter's impasse lay in their having to forcefully or willingly identify with prefixed communal and territorial sanctuaries, so as to be "cleared" of some of the past

"ignominy," the former lacks any such pledge towards the system that could tag her either as "lost" or "found."¹⁵⁹ Negating the traits that can appropriate her within the definition of

bhadramahila, this widowed woman is able to escape the patriarchal takeover of her body within predefined masculine identifications of class, caste and religion. She resists Borthwick's definition of *bhadramahila* as only "the mothers, wives and daughters of many school masters, lawyers, doctors and government servants who made up the English-educated professional

¹⁵⁹ Menon and Bhasin note that while immediate post-Partition years saw suspension of ritual and customary taboos around Partition widows, following their social acceptability and economic sufficiency, these restrictions were imbued again in the later years (Menon and Bhasin, "Partition Widows: The State as Social Rehabilitator").

Bengali middle-class or *bhadralok*” (quoted in Chatterjee 26). The East Bengali rural society plays a seminal role in fostering her easy-going ideas of “home” and “non-home.” For instance, village fetes generate moments of inter-penetration among non-like groups, especially the Hindus and the Muslims, without actual infringement of religious feelings. As Sikdar mentions how different households in Dighpait would accommodate the travellers who came to visit Jamalpur’s *Ashtami* fair, she suggests the same texture of warmth and hospitality that describes the aforementioned widow, and which cannot be compared to the constitution of an urban *bhadramahila*.

Maa, a “Counter” to the Rural Patriarchal Authority

In the absence of any direct authoritarian male within the family, Maa qualifies as the pre-*bhadramahila* prototype of matriarch, who looks after her natal parent’s homestead and manages the agro-based trades to help run the household. Her own illiteracy does not prevent her from encouraging the peasants to get empowered through education. Her important role in running the organizational constituents of the village school creates her unique space with respect to the idea of education. That she takes care not only of educational requirements but also the mundane concerns of the students, such as what food they would eat, how they would celebrate religious occasions like Saraswati Puja or Eid in school, or what the Muslim pupils would eat after Ramadan’s fast, shows her as a compassionate supervisor. Owing to the capacity by which she could also devise rather than only abide by the village society’s laws, her qualities are produced through combined aspects of victimization and empowerment. She is the complementary agency to that of the *zamindars*, who had deliberately limited the common villagers’ academic facilities, by not supplying required amenities to the school building. In this appropriation of education, as scholars like Guha and Chatterjee note, a *zamindar* would produce

himself as a *bhadralok*, if not by dint of culture and high learning, then by means of owning material possessions.

Though born among high-castes like the *zamindars*, Maa's position is not well-defined. In the first place, she cannot be assessed by the Victorian values of modesty that were adopted by urban elite women. As Swapna Banerjee notes, in response to the changed market relations and "cultural homogenization of the urban Bengali middle class," *bhadramahila* or "new woman" "was thus conceived by imposing a new kind of segregation on women. Middle-class women's identity now came to be defined by distinguishing them from not only the "westernized women" of the "wealthy parvenu families making a fortune out of imperial connections," but also from the majority of "common" working women whom the elites described as "loud, vulgar, coarse, and sexually promiscuous" (Singh 96, quoted in Banerjee 686). Maa can rather be identified in the open-ended middle-space of middle- and lower-class relations, as noticeable among rural communities, during festivals or exchange of labour with the economically lower group of women.

The *zamindar's* role in perpetuating ill-will among the village neighbours is understood, as Sobhan *dada* tells Doya about the age-old silent agony among the Bengali Muslims. He states:

Next year Bano *kaka* (Doya's father) will come from Hindustan, my father Shadisarkar is tending fish in his pond, has bought new cups and dishes from Mymensingh. But if my father sends a *daawat* (dinner invitation) to Bano *kaka*, will he be able to eat at our place? If *kaka* eats anything boiled inside our house, the *zamindar* will stop your family's services of barbers and washermen. Pocha *kaka* will no more conduct the different rituals in your home, the society will boycott you (89, translation mine).¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ As Priya Kumar observes: "...independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of states to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between peoples" (*Shadow Lines* 230, quoted in Kumar 205).

In this respect, Maa's choosing to stand by the marginalized in opposition to the *zamindar's* power,¹⁶¹ portrays her as the defender of underdogs. She gives shelter to the *zamindar's* poor family priest Pocha, who is falsely accused of stealing the deity's jewels, and as a consequence she is faced with social boycott. Her egalitarian attitude is equally directed to the Hindus and the Muslims – when a well-off refugee Muslim like Chand Khan scorns the poor refugee Muslim Achhar *bhai*, Maa defends the latter by asking the former to concede on humanitarian grounds. A similar figure like Maa who stands up for each and every villager's cause is Iyedali *kaka*. As Doya describes, he would support the poor and the rich alike, helping the native landless peasants like Majam Sheikh as much as the refugee Muslims from Cooch Bihar. Nevertheless, unlike Doya's unlettered Maa, Iyedali is advantaged with some basic homoeopathy skills to serve the people, and education has widened his perspectives. So while Maa would provide fatalistic explanations for inter-communal taboos, saying God has arranged these differences by sending individuals either to the Muslim or the Hindu fold, Iyedali would state that humanity preceded all sorts of religions and casteism. In this case, therefore, the non-*bhadralok*, through his well-informed socio-political approach, assumes a more sophisticated position in comparison to the rural *bhadramahila*.

It is useful to restate from my earlier argument that lack of education or belief in traditional taboos do not vitiate Maa's agency within the village community. When the police raids Maa's house based on the *zamindar's* spiteful instruction, and attempts to take away Doya's gold bangles, Maa vehemently reacts with the following statement:

¹⁶¹ The narrator vividly describes the parasitic image of the *zamindars* of Dighpait: "While the other Hindus were quitting their village homes, the *zamindars* continued to stay. Even as they expanded their property in Hindustan, they were not finding it easy to sell off their assets in Dighpait. It was difficult to obtain the desirable value for such enormous possessions" (91, translation mine).

Listen you son of a police, your men have touched my daughter; if they do not return those bangles that I bought with the selling price of my jute, I will not leave you. I will write to Ayub Khan in Karachi. Our Shadi's son Khaleq is a big boss in Ayub's army (93, translation mine).

In this, she emerges as a justice-seeking trader and landed peasant as well as a legitimate government subject, rather than a protection-seeking docile Hindu widow. Furthermore, Maa's naming a major political figure like Ayub Khan through the familiarity of village network reflects a rural woman's desire to be an active mediator in history, by making her village to penetrate the lattice of the mainstream nation.

The idea of gentlemanhood as Maa perceives it, breaks the conventional meaning of *bhadralok*. In Maa's telling the affluent Muslim refugee Chand Khan: "...I have never in my life seen a *bhadralok*'s son bickering about such non-issue. I have no idea where from you have come or what kind of hopeless laws your *desh* had, Chand..." (53, translation mine), she, in the capacity of an arbiter, unties "*bhadralok*'s" exclusive associations with Hindu-ness and Bengali-ness. According to Maa, in order to be part of the identity marker "*bhadralok*," one should only follow the ethical premises that were originally akin to the term,¹⁶² regardless of one's inborn caste or communal affiliations. The Islam-fearing police inspector fulfills this behavioral criterion of *bhadralok*, as he tells Doya, "Do not cry, dear. A sinner who could steal jewels from your tender hands will never reach the door of *behesht* (heaven)" (93, translation mine).

On the other hand, as Maa shames this inspector for not investigating into the Hindu *zamindar*'s tyranny, whereas the inspector retorts that within the village, it is binding for every household to abide by the *zamindar*'s rules, a complex facet of East Pakistan comes to view, where the Islamic state does not intrude into the small-scale Hindu-ruled rural communities.

¹⁶² Regarding Maa's egalitarianism, by virtue of which she sees every villager as having equal right to Dighpait's land, Prasanta Chakravarty states: "There is a remarkable entanglement, of the language of common rights with that of nature's bounty, local political tussles with much larger concerns" (Chakravarty, "The Return of Daya" n.p.).

Calling this inspector as the “Islamic government’s black sheep” (93), Maa as a rural *bhadramahila* mentally maps nationhood in terms of a family aggregate. She believes that having absolute confidence in the state’s leaders will deliver her from the local *zamindar*’s cruelty. Her hypothetical connection with macro-level politics situates her in a similar position as that of a local protestor, who imagines the government to be on her/his side.¹⁶³ Thus, quarrels within the village reproduce common domestic affairs, which engage with spitefulness, retribution and pain – the mundane modules of human relationships, but which do not indulge in “marinating and inwardness” (Chakravarty n.p.), as accentuated by an indifferent grief or *bishaad*. These kinds of interchanges reflect the quality of ordinary rural existence, and hardly insinuate animosity at a deeper level.

The narrator remembers her encounter with the border high commissioner, who was in charge of providing official permission to Maa and Doya for moving into the Indian province. In this retrospection, her flannel dress becomes the metaphor of her peasant-class identity, the significance of which can hardly be deciphered by a sophisticated civil servant in charge of routine inquiry. Maa and Doya get visibly annoyed as the commissioner asks Doya why she is wearing such a long flannel dress in summer. This awkward communication exposes two aspects of their incompatibility – as potential citizens of “India,” and as rural peasants and females from East Bengal. In the first case, it is plain that the decision-making bodies of the Indian nation-state will never be able to make way into the personal axes of the common people’s thought; outside the banal inquest aiming to record the moral probity of a would-be citizen, such dead, repetitive

¹⁶³ Sugata Bose observes: “Similar notions, real or imagined, of the support of a distant government against immediate oppressors have of course played an important role in the translation of peasant grievances into peasant rebellion” (*Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947* 191). While Mridula Mukherjee asserts that the subalterns are not able to carry out protests independently and rely on outside leadership, Shahid Amin, by observing the Gorakhpuri peasants’ perceptions of “Gandhiji,” concludes that subaltern action is not always a function of elite ascendancy. Rosalind O’Hanlon ascribes a “lack of control” to these movements (Engelsen Ruud 691-692).

and skeptic dialogues as prevalent in the volatile Indo-Pakistan borders in the 1950s and 1960s, obviated any kind of personalized contact. It is therefore impossible for a border officer, who is curious about a ten-year-old's peculiar clothing, to fathom about the economy of textile and money that a financially declining peasant family has to consider, while choosing the material and length of a girl's dress.

As about this dress, Doya reflects that Maa had very prudently selected something that would suit the cold days of winter, and that would last for several years of her childhood, until she outgrew it. Doya and her Maa's discomfort at the high commissioner's questions not only exposes their defensive attitude towards their own rural East Bengali Self, but also reveals their anxiety to cover up their present economic tightness, as is symbolized in the cheap thick flannel material of the dress.¹⁶⁴ As Maa angrily complains that the power of issuing consent for border crossing does not authorize the officer to talk about others' clothes, the *bhadralok* class' desperation to sustain a basic "self-respect," especially on the face of the landed peasantry's changing economico-political scenario, is outright realized. This protest echoes the grievance of

¹⁶⁴ Himani Bannerji studies the close tying up of women's textile with the discourse of shame (*lajja*) and an enforced seclusion of the *bhadramahila*'s body for the sake of virtues that suit her class. In the reorganization and reconstitution of new social relations as brought about by colonialism, women's clothing played a vital role. The morality and aesthetic embedded in dressing could enable a *bhadramahila* achieve her "different" status. According to Bannerji, the sartorial presentation of the female body was a powerful signifier of a woman's success and failure with respect to moral regulations. *Lajja* of the well-bred woman, being integral to the construction of a pro-rational and nationalist femininity, established the criteria for "civilization," and also acted as a censor in maintaining the legend of the "good woman" and punishing the "aberrant." Women's magazine writers such as Khastagiri and Kumari Soudamini describe such properly clothed women, who were considered as the crowns of modesty, and recognized through their attributes of pride combined with politeness, good manners, tranquility and innocence. Starting from feudal, pre-British aristocracy to the colonial new propertied class, woman's body has been treated as an object of censure. Because physicality was equated with feminine nature, its denial with the aid of "decent" clothing revealed an anxious surveillance of the female body and a misogynous way of thinking. With respect to Doya's experience, the commissioner's questioning about her dress can, at a metaphorical level, be read as an enquiry on her moral correctness as a future Indian feminine subject. On the other hand, the long dress can also be analyzed as a sign of over-protectiveness of Doya's body, in differentiation from the non-*bhadra* camp-dwelling refugee women, who, as Bannerji observes, were not entitled to the morality associated with *lajja*. For more see Bannerji's "Textile Prison: Discourse on Shame (*Lajja*) in the Attire of the Gentlewoman (*bhadramahila*) in Colonial Bengal."

landowning East Bengali *bhadra* families towards the administrative apparatus, whose changing devices drastically deteriorated their conditions.

Doya – A Different *Bhadramahila* in the Rural Mosaic

The gendered bodily awareness that Maa tries to instill in child Doya is based on the limited and traditionalist knowledge available to her, which does not allow perceptions of femininity to emerge in any other way. Doya is repeatedly told from various sources (the primary source being her Maa) that a female who has not come of age through her menstrual cycle is too inconsequential to be judged an offender by God, even if she violates caste and communal sanctity. In this, her body is perceived as that of a burgeoning *bhadramahila* that has not yet become so. The local belief that as a child, her eating “taboo food” cooked by “taboo people” is supposed to be “overlooked” by God, marginalizes Doya from the mainstream village society, which is also a microcosmic nation-space. Furthermore, such a belief adds caste and religious values to her reproductive faculty as belonging to a non-adult, non-male being. There is as much deprecation in treating her pre-pubescent body in terms of total freedom, as there is utilitarianism adhered to her post-pubescent sexuality, through its forceful installation within the masculine nation-state. Only by being sexually disposed at the “service” of nationhood can a female body gain visibility, albeit as a secondary occupant, within the political scope of citizenship.¹⁶⁵ In this respect, Maa’s goading Doyamoyee’s admittance into the realm of “propriety” represents her as a female patriarch.

In contrast, Doyamoyee’s deviation from the ideal rearing of a *bhadramahila* becomes apparent, as she learns about Hindu *shastra sloka* from her Muslim neighbor Samsher *chacha*.

¹⁶⁵ Veena Das notes that women are excluded from the originary imagination of national social order. Their reproductive facility is seen to be rightly belonging to the state, as the “legitimate” sons are taken into the nation’s services (Das, “Violence, Gender and Subjectivity” 285).

Being a Bihari refugee Muslim peasant, Samsheer is the marker of every possible Other with respect to an upper-caste Hindu gentlewoman. It is, however, ironical that this illiterate non-*bhadralok* deciphers an otherwise sexist Hindu *shastra* verse. While the original verse was meant to instruct about women's subjugated social standing, he interprets it in terms of Hindu woman's power and agency. Doya's heterodox frame of mind also expands by picking up knowledge of Buddhist philosophy from her Muslim neighbour Iyedali *kaka*. Her liberal opinion becomes a source of problem for her orthodox Hindu Maa, and earns her the name of "*jaat khauni*" – one who eats up or ruins her/his own caste. Doya recalls how she would violate the rules that the Hindus ought to follow in Muslim households:

My Maa had warned me, "Eat the jaggery, eat the betel leaf, do not drink water." Drinking water implied losing one's caste. But I had not kept Maa's words, I had drunk water. After listening to the tales of Buddha from Iyedali *kaka*, I do not pay heed to everything that Maa says (83, translation mine).

Moreover, Doya remembers how the females of the so-called "non-*bhadralok*'s" fold enjoyed equal freedom in many aspects as their male counterparts:

In the evening, *chachi* (Shamsheer *chacha*'s wife) would wear shoes after washing off her hands and feet. This kind of liberty was unknown to other womenfolk in the village. My father had put in considerable effort to take the *zamindars*' sons to the city and help them obtain academic degrees. They never lacked money too. Yet, I have always seen their wives and daughters walking around bare-footed. The *zamindars* had several pairs of footwears, but their female kin had none (49, translation mine).

Part of Doya's growing up is therefore her outgrowing the given social strictures, learning to criticize Hinduism's fallacies as embedded in its caste, class and gender prejudices, from the optic supplied by the likes of Shamsheer *chacha* and Iyedali *kaka*. She observes Eid Roza along with her caretaker Majam *dada* and eats *sarkaai* with him to break the fast. She belongs to the mixed culture of Dighpait, and sees Allah as a simple resort for serious man-made problems. Her conversation with her *dada* (Majam) reveals a plain and amenable spirit of human religiosity, as

was widespread in the pre-Partition pluralist society of East Bengal: ““*Dada*, what does Allah do to those who are Hindu and worship the goddesses Durga, Kali and Lakshmi?” In reply Dada says, “O Doya are you mad? There is no tiff between Allah and Durga or Lakshmi. In *behesht* (heaven), they all live and love one another. No room for quarrel. Such are the doings of humans” (12, translation mine). In this religion of *paraan* or soul saving, which is not willing, in Chakravarty’s words, to pay for the “luxurious ideals and caste,” there is an “entrenched impatience against caste hierarchies without pre-emptive secular dismissals” (n.p.).¹⁶⁶ Sikdar’s testimonial is also a shift from mainstream writings, which, as Swapna Banerjee observes, portray domestic workers in the light of negative traits, such as indolence, dishonesty or promiscuity. Her writing is rather a critique of one’s own class-caste position that, by underlining the positives of the subordinate labour, reveal “...the disjuncture between ideology and lived-experience...the ambivalence and ambiguity in middle class cultural patterns and practices” (Banerjee 688). In Doya’s congenital liking for peasantry and spending time in cattle-sheds, getting acquainted to the folklores of Laila-Majnu, Yusuf-Zulekha or Shiri-Farhad, and developing a premature political interest by reading articles in *Ittefaq*, there is a constant transgression of the stable boundaries that imagine the role of a *bhadramahila*. As she admits that her knowledge of preparing cattle fodder, threshing rice or splitting lentils proved to be of no use in her later life (85), she implies that the artificial borders drawn by Partition went as far as changing human conditions forever, compelling a rural child to assume an urban woman’s life.

¹⁶⁶ The religion of *paraan* echoes Spivak’s idea of temporizing points in the vision of Bengali identity as “a gender liberated, egalitarian and humane people, domesticating Buddhism as high Buddhism moves to East Asia, coming to terms with Islam as Bengali Islam opens its doors to the oppressed outcastes, acknowledging the body as the iconic representation of the universe” (Spivak, “Moving Devi” 137). Such *dvaita* structure of feeling represents Bengali humanism.

The wide gap between Doya and her immediate birth family becomes evident in her conversation with her West Bengali siblings, who, drawing from overarching socio-political debates about boundaries and differentiations, call the Himalayas as their “own” and the East Bengal rivers Meghna and Padma as Doyamoyee’s. Her siblings’ sense of supremacy is explicit, as her brother tells her: “From “our” country’s Himalayas the rivers flow to “your” country. If the river’s mouth is blocked, it will not flow into your land. What will then happen to you (105, translation mine)?” Moreover, in reply to Doya’s gullible comment that Nehru, being a “good man” will never do such a thing, her brother points out that while Nehru is very close to them, Ayub Khan is totally unknown to her. This might sound as child gabble, but is not so, given the similar kind of cut-throat arguments on border issues that were going on in the pre- and post-Partition decades among the adjoining nations. The children’s sense of partisanship seems to imitate India and Pakistan’s self-image-building through exclusion of the geographical, cultural, linguistic and religious specificities of the enemy nation-state. There is a clear difference between Doya’s brother’s and Doya’s positions as future political and national subjects, both in terms of their growing up respectively in urban West Bengal and rural East Bengal, and as prospective *bhadralok* and *bhadramahila*. As the brother imagines himself to be well-connected to the illustrious names but Doya to be not, Doya’s presence is signified in every way of subservience. Her current marginalized status as a Hindu female under a Muslim male ruler in East Pakistan, and her linguistic, cultural and gender alienation as a potential citizen of India and West Bengal, underscores her socio-political distancing as a minor civilian. Maa carefully acculturates Doya before taking her to her parents’ home in West Bengal, by reminding her to add honorary prefixes before names, such as *Sriyuktababu* before father and brother’s names, *Swargiya* (Late) before the deceased grandfather’s name and *Shrimati* before mother and sister’s

names. Such instructions imply uprooting of Doya's casual girlhood from Dighpait and its subsequent grafting in an alien setting. These lessons would henceforth structure Doya in allegiance with the identity marker of *bhadramahila*.

Myths at the Interface of Dighpait and the "Nation"

Doyamoyee observes the distance between the concept of the nation-state and her village Dighpait. She states:

Dighpait never had riots...concealed in these verdant shades, the news of our village hardly reaches the outsiders. Just as there has been no riot, similarly the reports of local people dying of forest epidemics, or succumbing to starvation after eating all sorts of inedible undergrowths – do not reach anyone's ears. The government's hand does not reach us. In the village, the zamindar *bhuiyababus* spell the last word (45, translation mine).

In another part, this insurmountable gap is visible, where all the villagers, negligent of the small-pox pandemic that had earlier claimed so many lives, hide in forests when urban medical representatives come to vaccinate them. Even for the relatively "progressive" families like Doya's who do not shy away from vaccination, the extreme pain and sore that follows and which is cured by regular application of sesame oil and homemade bandages, implies the parallel presence of two sets of knowledge-systems among the villagers. In the post-Partition period, because of better transportation facilities and increased influence of urban education and lifestyle, village life becomes an intersection of modernity and tradition, a hybrid of science and magic. Besides the society of the *bhadralok*, new changes, to an extent, also touch the society of the non-*bhadralok*. Doya's childhood is a curious admixture of Iyedali *kaka's* homoeopathy, the local shaman's talismans and charms, and the certified doctors' occasional prescription of medicine. According to the narrator, the village is a closed community, which can barely make sense of the political happenings of the State. As initially happened among the Dalit immigrants

(see Chapter 1), in Dighpait too, the very thought of “India” harbingers an ungrounded sense of confidence, and the government is deified as a god.

According to Ranajit Guha, the circulation of rumour plays a vital role in creating an optimistic vision about larger and intangible politics. The mythical life and essence of village society and the corpus of national politics meet at the crossroads of a vicarious simulacrum. As a political hearsay travels from centre to margin, it picks up traits such as “anonymity,” “cognitive unclarity” and “plasticity that enables it to undergo transformations similar to...those which occur, according to Propp, in fairy tales” (Guha, “Transmission” 261).¹⁶⁷ The following excerpt describes Doya’s villagers’ reaction towards the much disputed Dandakaranya Rehabilitation Project, based on a letter from India written by a peasant fellow-villager called Toga. This letter is further read out and interpreted by a semi-literate layman named Goni *miyan*:

Once Goni *kaka* brought excellent news to Maa. At Dandakaranya, the Dey household’s Toga is leading a very good life. He has been given farming land, bullocks to till the soil, equipments to put up a house...all the farming facilities have been provided by Motilal’s son Jawaharlal. Only the land is a bit arid, but if cultivated well, everything will be fine. Government has given paddy seeds. After the breaking of this news, everyone in the village uttered benedictory words about Jawaharlal. I was having goosebumps all over my body, the Dandakaranya from Ramayana! Toga *dada* has made his home there! I felt that Toga *dada* was so lucky... (88, translation mine).

¹⁶⁷ Ramachandra Guha studies that even in the colonial times, the peasant’s notion of Swaraj was fundamentally in conflict with the nationalist dreams. For example, the *otiyars* (subaltern volunteers) preferred saffron clothes over the white khaddar textile that Gandhi so much insisted on. They bifurcated from the Gandhian “androgynous” sense of sacrifice, relating more with the “tough masculine bodies” that their forefathers took pride in. Their struggle was therefore both against the colonial repression as well as the cartel of Congress politics (Guha, “Subaltern and Bhadrak Studies” 2058). In the context of the underclass discourses, Gandhian politics is criticized for coining the euphemistic term “Harijan” (child of Hari/Vishnu, a prominent god in the Hindu pantheon) as a collective designation for the Untouchables. Such a signifier was not only a symptom of humiliation and snobbishness of the upper-castes, but based on the assumption of automatic integration of the lower-rank people within Hinduism’s corpus, regardless of their consent or willful participation. In defiance of this Gandhian sympathetic terminology, they preferred the Sanskrit term “Dalit.”

What is remarkable here is the invisibility of Toga in his own letter, compared to the larger-than-life image of Jawaharlal Nehru and an upturned glimpse of the actual nation-wide goings-on in India, through extolling of the actions of high-flying leaders. Guha reflects:

...in conformity with the semi-feudal conditions of his existence the peasant's code of political thinking in this period also involved conceptualizing all higher authority such as that of kings, landlords, priests, elders, males, etc. as quasi-divine (265).

Similarly, Nehru, on being remembered by his first name, is conceived through exaggerated wishful thinking, and taken as a down-to-earth godly figure.

Suranjan Das observes that the formal documentary media of newspapers, pamphlets and journals, as controlled by the Hindus and Muslims during Partition, such as the newspapers *Star of India*, *Azad* and *Asr-e-Jadid* by the Muslims and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Basumati* by the Hindus, formed a separate genre of "propaganda literature." They disseminated half-truths and brewed up tell-tales. In Ella Moore's words:

Following independence, news was spread through posters and proved difficult to spread to villagers and peasants, even in urban areas the illiterate majority of the population were forced to depend on others for news and information (Moore n.p.).

Further, as Gyanendra Pandey states: "...partition was accompanied by an acidic paper trail of pamphlets, letters and newsprint that created a sphere of paranoid and partial knowledge" (ibid.), these accounts emerge as the deliberate literary channels for spreading unrest at the heart of the society.¹⁶⁸ Das cites from records:

¹⁶⁸ Khadija Mastoor's short story "His Only Sister, his Treasure" recalls this inhuman aspect of the two elite apparatuses – print media and rumor – in riling the microcosmic relations at the rural levels, by conveying manipulated news on communal political affairs. The Muslim *zamindar* reading out national events from a newspaper and interpreting the events to the illiterate villagers serves the purpose of instilling mass fear and insecurity necessary for divisive politics. Against the backdrop of the Partition turmoil, the *zamindar* uses negative rumor to fulfil his communally hostile ends by enraging a landless peasant, and afterwards, by marking him as a fanatic anti-social. The peasant's socio-economic dependence on the *zamindar's* land, on the one hand, and his duty towards his sister, whose dowry shall be paid off with his labour, on the other, prevents him from insurgency.

For example, the *Azad* which had a wide circulation among the Muslims in Dacca, reported in detail on 23 March an alleged episode involving the decapitation of a Muslim student and the stripping of Muslim women. But the District Magistrate of Dacca, J. George, claimed 'to hold a signed statement' from the local correspondent of the news agency on the doubtful validity of the report. The Dacca Riot Enquiry Committee too corroborated that the news was fabricated....For example, on 19 March the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* referred to the molestation of Hindu women who were on their way back from a temple in Sankharibazar. But police and departmental enquiries showed the news to be 'false' (146-7).

It is not easy to draw any conclusive idea about the contemporary situation, based on these sketchy records. The police and high officials may have played the Nehruvian politics' puppet in representing a safer image of East Bengal than it actually was, with the aim of decreasing the bulk of East Bengali Hindus' influx into India. On the other hand, the newspapers, functioning under elite heads and devoted to the cause of fundamentalism that would mutually benefit a selected group of Hindus and Muslims, may have concocted or at least inflated electrifying stories, in order to hasten the objective of Partition. In any case, the aim of bringing the masses in contact with these unverified and controversial pseudo-facts, be it either through diminishing or overstating facts, is not a sign of guiltless transparency.

Compared to such "propaganda literature" that engenders a "problematic dialectic" by altogether affecting the "structure of power in society" (Das 192), and renders both the literate and the illiterate masses as passive mediums, subaltern Toga's letter signifies a misinformed reception of and reaction towards the ideas and ideologies about the world of organized politics. While Toga's letter, unlike the elitist "propaganda literature," does not deliberately intend to equivocate or mislead, it is highly possible that such a letter is the result of his own confused position and diluted comprehension of the rehabilitation policies. Ironically, despite giving a

The loyalty produced out of feudalist inter-relationships, thus, helps to indemnify the pseudo-truths disseminated by the powerful (*Cool, Sweet Water: Selected Stories*).

non-elite account of the method of rehabilitation, Toga's letter is as remote to reality as the elitist and biased "propaganda literature." By its misplaced understanding, the letter serves to convey a Congressite vision, infecting Dighpait's populace with the same false hope that Toga himself has fallen for. On the face of chain recurrence of betrayal of the commoner's dreams by "high-politics," it is hard to tell if an insignificant letter by a peasant to his villagers can be considered a resistance-free reflection of his own mind. This, in turn, supports the argument made in an earlier section of this chapter – that whenever history and personal writing are collapsed, the question of power underlying the politics of representation cannot go unnoticed.¹⁶⁹

Hierarchy Within the Agro-based Rural Community

In the opening of her narrative, Sikdar explains that the rural impression of *bhadralok* is built not only on an individual's economic might, but also by the choice and pattern of living. The rich Muslim households are ineligible for this definition in spite of their social capital, because they fail to register with the Hindu sense of "honour," "prestige" and "hierarchy," the roots of which trace back to the caste system. For instance, on knowing that the Bhoumik family's ancestral land will be bought by one well-to-do Lalan Sheikh, the blacksmith family's Romesh *babu* retorts:

The Sheikhs from Shoirshabari will buy such a big property? The Sheikhs feel no need of *bargas*. They are in charge of their own ploughs and bullocks. They drive their own plough. This is not a doable thing for us the Hindus. We do not have the impudence to go down the field and cultivate it ourselves. We have shame, prestige. Musalmans lack such encumbrances. Shadi Sarkar has so much possession; the sons have all completed secondary education. Yet one can see

¹⁶⁹ The "propaganda literature" discussed above, which act as liaison between personal consciousness and historical "truth," resembles, in some aspects, what Spivak describes as archive. In explaining the difference between archive and literature, she defines former as: "...the construction of a fiction whose task was to produce a whole collection of "effects of the real"..." ("History" 203). In LaCapra's words: "The archive as fetish is a literal substitute for the "reality" of the past which is "always already" lost for the historian" ("Is Everyone a Mentalité Case?" 92). In this respect, Spivak reads the importance of literature in directly supplementing "the writing of history with suspicious ease" (205). I have discussed in details on historical and literary memory, in an earlier part of this chapter.

them folding their *tafans* (cloth worn around the waist, covering lower part of male body) and walking down to till the soil. My, having learnt to read and write, couldn't you uphold the value of education? (16, translation mine)

This statement comes from a “low-caste” Hindu himself, in whose house, much like in a Muslim's, caste Hindus such as Doya's family would not accept cooked food. In his statement, Romesh suggests that only Hindus can be the legitimate owners of East Bengal lands. His sense of entitlement is based on an assumption of religious superiority. By mocking the wealthy and educated Muslims' apparently odd interest in farming, he intimates that they are unsuitable for the scholastic and professional spheres, and suggests that they “naturally” belong to the class of *rayats* (tenants). According to Romesh, the affluent Muslim's inability to produce himself according to the cultural tenets of the *bhadralok* is proof enough of his undeserving entrée into the realm that had thus far been justifiably hogged by Hindu *babus*. The casteist rule that in order to be reckoned a socially honourable man, one is expected to maintain *bargas* (subsidiary workers), rather than be directly associated with labour, debunks the *bhadralok* as a practitioner and creator of social inequalities and exploitations.

In the context of Bengali agro-based community, it is also crucial to study the import of rice. As the staple food-grain in the eastern provinces of India, the asymmetry among communities, classes and castes is metaphorically concentrated in the type of rice a household consumes. As the quality of rice alters from home to home, it carries within it the particular essence of a Bengali household's economic and social status. Paul Greenough's reading expounds the significance of rice in a Bengali household:

Rice which is converted to the living flesh, is not lifeless in Bengal, even though our own culture has a long since turned bread to stone... They revere paddy as a form of the deity. Possession of paddy land is valued above money and gold, the sharing of rice is the premiere demonstration of indulgence... It has social, sacral and even cosmic links... The moral economy of rice in much of Asia is more truly

moral, more pregnant with implication, than economic and political historians have been ready to admit (849).

Doya understands Majam's subservient social status, upon noticing the separate brand of rice served to him. Between Doya's *kalojire* rice and Majam's *hashkhola* rice lies a splitting and fixing of social allocations, which cannot be exchanged under normal circumstances. In Doya's wanting to taste the rice that Majam eats daily, she temporarily challenges the dictums that control her association with Majam. She finds *hashkhola* rice particularly bland, whereas in Majam's words, it has a "sweet" flavour and more importantly "stays in one's stomach like stone. We work in the ranch. Sharply feel the pang of hunger. The stomach cries" (14). Eating the two different varieties of rice in uninterchangeably separate spaces – Majam in the courtyard and Doya indoors – additionally makes their social distance inflexible.

As Majam starts to carry one of his rationed meals back home, the meager *hashkhola* rice, upon being shared by the numerous mouths in his family, becomes a frail solution in the face of poverty. His brother's losing *barga* after the emigration of a Hindu family, the need for the womenfolk to go out and lend hands in threshing, a newborn being precariously left alone as all the members work in the field – in other words, the increasing economic struggle for a Dalit Muslim family – is testified in Majam's taking home his daily allowance of coarse rice. For this section of people who can hardly afford a square meal, eating stone-like rice is the only viable option, as it deters the hassle of quick digestion and frequent pangs of hunger. The *bhadralok*'s *kalojire* or fine rice that does not stay like a heavy weight inside one's stomach for long, and which therefore needs to be eaten in a larger quantity and more often, is seen as an unreasonable luxury by the landless *rayats*.

Majam's contentment in eating the inferior variety of *hashkhola* rice, and his compliance in reproducing himself as the subordinate of his "*maai-baap*" (mother-father,

referring to the Bhowmik family), implies his innate loyalty towards the feudal status-quo in a rural condition. Contrarily, the Dalit refugees pose challenges and revolt against the establishment and the government, in the immigrated land of West Bengal.¹⁷⁰ This is because the feudal lord's ethical obligations to look after the material security of his subjects is absent in the case of a dictatorial and capitalist management in postcolonial India. The rice that a peasant earned through the dignity of physical labour in East Bengal loses its associated value and quality upon being doled out as free support. While Majam, in the East Pakistan setting, is given rice and encouraged to eat and live so that he may, in turn, repay his labour towards the feudal landlord's prosperity, the Dalit refugees are reckoned as redundant, who may serve the government only through their withdrawal from Bengal and India.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I study Sunanda Sikdar's childhood retrospections to bring to light an altered sense of *bhadramahila* in a post-Partition rural setting, whose character is in a constant dialogue with the non-*bhadralok* sections of the society. The narrator Doya is an alter-ego of her

¹⁷⁰ In recounting his childhood days' misery as a Dalit refugee in the Bishnupur refugee camp, Manoranjan Byapari recurrently touches on the metaphor of rice. Reference to rice lays bare the government's open apathy towards this superfluous population, who had migrated from a fertile land to a land of shortage, and had consequently degraded from active peasants and farmers to beggars, labours and poor dependents. Byapari tells how trying to buy a small measure of the better quality rice was the prerogative of his family whenever they could afford, because the rice allotted to them as part of the government's relief was inedible and detrimental to health. The Dalit collective memories in the refugee camp is, thus, overrun with the sign of "bhutta-milo-kaun" rice, which needed to be boiled into a thin solution and then washed down. When even that was not available, they would live on sinewy porridge made of foodgrain-dusts (*khud*). In general, the post-World War phase witnessed a skyrocketing market-rate of rice, which made it a distant and unaffordable commodity as such. In that light, the lure of a ladleful of rice concoction offered by welfare organizations prompted countless Dalit refugees to stand overnight in queues more than one mile long. Even as the government-sponsored foul-smelling rice would give an impression of some decade-old wasted grains that lay in the military ware-house during the Second World War, the lack thereof would show in every other aspects of the refugees' deprivation – lack of clothing, shelter and education. From this, one may fathom the value of rice in Dalit refugee homes. Dalit refugees' desire to spend money on buying good quality rice was, in a way, a fight-back against the silent homicidal path chosen by the government through distribution of mouldy food grains. The frantic will of gathering rice is therefore the disillusioned grassroots immigrants' counter-action towards the injury done to them by the bureaucracy ("Ananta Ratir Chandal" 224-225).

foster mother's contradictory character. Illiterate yet running the ancestral trades of the family ranch, a critic of Hindu widow customs yet who wants her niece to become a pure *bhadramahila*, a believer in dogmatic rituals yet who struggles for the subalterns' right to education – Doya's Maa is as incompatible with the "authentic" idea of *bhadramahila* as Adhir Biswas and Manoranjan Byapari are with the idea of *bhadralok*. Through her composite communal, class and caste consciousness and understanding of *desh* (country) as no more tactile than her own village Dighpait, Maa is the primary discoverer of the love for peasantry within Doya. Like Maa, Doya's identity is also not limited into any one-dimensional and over-arching meaning. Her discomfort upon being artificially inserted into the post-Partition urbane Calcuttan culture lays bare the randomness and absurdity of the administrative decision about Partition. Superficially adapting to the mannerisms of *bhadramahila* yet permanently carrying within her the bewildered child Doyamoyee, writer Sunanda Sikdar's torn-apart personality seems to have hardly overcome or accepted the shock of Partition afterlife. Yet, her writing does not resort to compromising her inner sufferings for the service of predictable memory-formations. In this, Doya as a narrator retains her discipline with respect to the easy tropes of affect and nostalgia, by not doubling a fabricated ideal of Dighpait for perverse appropriation of power.

CHAPTER 3: “Feminism” Etched on the Body of “Raped Hindu Refugee Woman”

Introduction

In the last two chapters, I examined two reverse loci. Chapter 1 looks into the development of Dalit class intellectuals in the post-Partition era, who enter the “*bhadralok*’s” space through education. Chapter 2 studies the circumstance of a rural East Bengali *bhadramahila*, who transcends her high-born Hindu middle-class setting, to connect with the non-*bhadra* peasantry neighbourhood. By stressing facets of the rural subaltern or the unconventional “*bhadra*” female immigrant’s refugee experiences that have otherwise remained understated in mainstream Bengal Partition narratives, I propose that these subjects’ writings counter the idealistic imagination created around the East Bengali immigrant *bhadralok*.

In this chapter, I examine how Jyotirmoyee Devi’s novel *The River Churning* (*Epar Ganga Opar Ganga* 1967, Bengali) can be read not only in terms of the female protagonist and riot victim’s gendered trauma and emotional hurdles, but also as her ambitious journey to achieve *bhadralok*-centric social goals. *The River Churning* centres on the life of Sutara Dutta, daughter of a *bhadralok* school-master in a village located in the Noakhali district of East Bengal. During the pre-Partition communal riots of 1946, the local Muslim subalterns, mainly from the Dalit peasant groups who also work as domestics in her house, kill her father, most probably rape and abduct her mother and sister (as is implied but never directly mentioned in the text) and burn down the ancestral homestead. The village school’s headmaster Tamijuddin *saheb* rescues her and after the subsiding of riots, consigns her to her brother’s custody in Calcutta. At her brother’s in-laws’ house in Calcutta (where her brother’s family has to temporarily move because of communal unrests at his own locality), Sutara faces discrimination and is treated as an “Untouchable,” because she is an East Bengali refugee orphan, who has allegedly lost her

“caste” by living at her Muslim rescuer’s house. Her brother’s relatives send her to a boarding school, and in the course of time, she grows up to become a history teacher at a women’s college in Delhi. Her post-Partition presence in Calcutta and Delhi is marked by a silence on her part about the Noakhali episode, and an unexpressed pain persistently choking her spontaneous Self. Not able to overcome the past, and not accepted by her Calcutta kin, she leads a sequestered life, until Promode, her sister-in-law’s brother, proposes to marry her.

While Sutara’s entire state of existence is pivoted around her trying to achieve the ideal of *bhadramahila*, she is different from the narrator Doyamoyee in *Doyamoyeer Katha* (see Chapter 2). Doya, notwithstanding her juvenile breaching of inherited Hindu-ness, such as in terms of observing the discriminatory custom of Untouchability, is afterwards integrated within the *bhadralok* fold. On the other hand, Sutara’s journey is marked by her relegation, from a *bhadralok*’s “proper” daughter to an all of a sudden riot-stricken orphan, who, as many critics interpret, has possibly also been raped.¹⁷¹ Critical readings of the novel by Jasodhara Bagchi, Jill Didur, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Debali Mookerjee-Leonard and Paulomi Chakraborty have

¹⁷¹ Scholars of feminist theory, cultural pathology theory and strategic rape theory deem wartime rape as an upshot of socio-cultural influences in a given society and a manifestation of misogynist attitude, rather than a libidinal impulse. The feminist perspective sees it as a vehicle for extending male control on women’s body by taking advantage of the chaotic wartime milieu and venting urges to terrible effects, such that rape becomes the product of patriarchal society’s systematic oppression, “enforcing and perpetuating patriarchal gender arrangements from which all men benefit” (Gottschall 130-131). War itself is a homosocial phenomenon, which sees women as its enemy and Other. While cultural pathology theory peers back into the nation’s history in order to trace the developmental factors leading to the barbarism in the present, the strategic rape theory consensually zeroes down on wide-scale rape as an inevitable ordinance comparable to bombs and propaganda (131), and sees it as a “coherent, coordinated, logical, and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare” (131). Acting towards annihilating “a people and a culture,” rape “split the familial atoms of which every society is composed” (131). The consequences borne by a raped woman – pregnancy, physical and psychological injuries, social ostracism and death “degrade the ability of a culture to replenish itself through social reproduction” (131). Finally, according to the biosocial theory, rape by soldiers fulfils demographic determinism, as it abides by the “natural law” that women at their reproductive peak are the worst victims. Such explanation fails to anticipate the wanton sexualized violence including post-rape murders (134). In the same way, Randy Thornhill and Nancy Wilmsen Thornhill treat the rapist as a victim of biology and see rape as “an adaptive response to biological differences between men and women” and an “evolutionary advantage” (May and Strikwerda 139). Further, Lionel Tiger perceives aggression as an intrinsic part of male biological evolution, which grows in a social context (141).

addressed the issue of “silencing,” but ignored Sutara’s natal class and caste identity.¹⁷² I suggest that because she belongs to “*bhadra*” social standing, there is a complicity of class and caste in the *bhadra* society, as epitomized in the character of her brother’s mother-in-law, in worsening her experience as a pariah refugee girl. Would a non-*bhadramahila* need to struggle so much with the ideal of righteousness, if placed in the same situation as Sutara Dutta? Underscoring only the gender and the sexuality of a molested woman reduces her to being just a body, which cannot be differentiated from other molested female bodies. As I subsequently argue, Jyotirmoyee Devi has frequently treated Sutara as a stock figure of refugee working woman in postcolonial India, depriving her, in the process, of her individuality. On the other hand, considering the caste and class dimensions of the female body helps to identify the power dynamics or the lack thereof, which distinguishes one rape victim from the other. Subjected to the same conditions of sexual abuse, as in case of innumerable refugee women of Partition, caste and class identities can make one woman irremediably a prey, whereas they can turn another into a victim turned into an agent.

Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin look at the gendered form of massacres that took place during Partition, when a woman’s body became a synecdoche of honour for her kin’s community, and conversely a territory of annexation for the enemy. How a woman’s body bore the brunt of inter-communal hatred and became a receptacle of morbid radicalism is understood from acts – such as tattooing or amputating her private parts. Penetration and disfiguring of her body was implied as violation of whatever was considered sacrosanct and exclusive by the other community.

¹⁷² Caste in the Indian social space has both structural and cultural systems. While the structural aspects are maintained by ensuring that a clan does not marry outside its caste or sub-caste, the cultural aspects propagate hierarchical values regarding the concepts of purity and pollution, naturalizing hereditary transmission of caste occupation as well as differences in psychological traits and lifestyles according to one’s caste (Liddle and Joshi 58). For gender and caste-politics practiced by Brahmins in Bengal, see Chatterjee, “Kulinism amongst the Brahmins in Bengal.”

To add to this affliction, women's own families (both male and female) took on quasi-murderers' roles, goading the "violated" women to commit group suicides through strangulation, jumping into fire or wells/rivers or by touching electric wires. Women were not in charge of their own lives and preferences, and the ideology of "honourable death" over living an "ignominious life" was forced upon them.

Ritu Menon discusses how, in the context of rehabilitation, the abducted woman's body becomes a crucial definer of identities and demarcator of boundaries within community, gender and nation ("Reproducing the Legitimate Community" 15). Similarly, Tanika Sarkar notes that Hindu militant reformist schemes saw a Hindu woman's abduction as a sign of the community's attenuation of power, through the capturing of fertile wombs. Women are at the same time powerless and marginal, and yet incorporated into a new politics as mothers of future leaders (Sarkar 91). Based on these critics' observations, in this chapter, I show that as a riot-inflicted and presumably raped woman, the narrator makes Sutara's gendered body reclaim its "respectable" ("*bhadra*") status, by obeying the strictures of middle-class, upper-caste Hindu-ness. The narrator's emphasis on "Sutara The Victim"'s abject image, based on the assumption that she is a sexually violated female, facilitates the novel's admittance within the canonical literary corpus of Bengal Partition. Sutara's silence about the "rape" produces her as a conformist middle-class woman and qualifies the highly esteemed attributes of an "authentic" *bhadramahila*, thereby acting as the novel's chief ingredient that identifies with mainstream "Bengal Partition Memory." Partition scholars have recurrently discussed the silencing of women's voices by official historiography, especially of those who were abducted, raped and later rehabilitated.¹⁷³ As I discussed in Chapter 2, nationalistic narratives largely

¹⁷³ Sukrita Paul Kumar looks at the way the tropes, such as forgetting, discontinuity, exclusion and silencing in the Partition narratives resulted mostly in the invisibilization of women, such that "remembering" becomes a strategy of relocating one's Self. Women in several official and unofficial documents have been perceived as objects, not

interpret victimized women in terms of their lack of agency, and depict them as objects of sympathy for having lost their claim to moral correctness. Like these narratives, *The River Churning* delineates a unilinear account of “sexual dishonor” of Sutara. Jyotirmoyee Devi omits the protagonist’s class, caste and communal dimensions and only highlights a crisis encompassing her sexuality. In fact, I interpret the novel as the story of a woman, who gives up her gendered freedom, in order to acquire social advantages in terms of caste and class. Jyotirmoyee Devi not only presents the protagonist as a historical emblem of the “Partition Rape Victim,” but in maintaining the latter’s passivity and silence, also produces her as an aspirant of bourgeois social hierarchy. Rather than a sign of trauma, silence for Sutara, as projected by the writer, becomes an instrument in gaining upward mobility and inclusion within the *bhadra* fold. The overpowering narratorial voice that offers a “politics of sentiment” under the apparent crust of feminism¹⁷⁴ is not freed from safe typecasts that reduce a female riot victim into a rape victim, and a rape victim into someone perpetually grovelling to win back the heteronormative bourgeois society’s licence of “honour.”

In Sutara’s desire to identify with purist Hindu institutions, such as by going on a pilgrimage for self-atonement, performing *pinda* (libation) for the salvation of her riot-demolished kin and finally, consenting to marry within an orthodox and pompous *bhadralok* family, the female body disappears underneath the demands of community, caste and class. The author shows the expectation regarding her marriage as the ultimate goal and the highest milestone in the novel. The patriarchal

subjects. Yet, Partition disruptions also offered possibilities of radical recasting of women’s identities. “Progressive Education Reports” suggest that massive projects for educating women were launched as part of rehabilitation programmes by the Indian government soon after Partition. For widows, Partition meant suspending of many social constraints, as they had to acquire economic worth and move beyond the traditional prescriptives (“Remembering Women”).

¹⁷⁴ Born in the family of the Dewan of Jaipur’s Maharajah, author-narrator Jyotirmoyee Devi hails from a distinctly aristocratic background. As a young widow, she had spent a greater part of her life in her natal parent’s home (Introduction xxv). Her feminism is deeply influenced by the Gandhian principles, and directed towards serving the socially oppressed (xxxii). From this information, she can be posited as the ideal modern *bhadramahila*.

apparatus that Butalia, Menon, Sarkar and Basu criticize is also the one that grants Sutara her “lost” identity and *bhadramahila*-hood, in exchange of making her abide by its preset masculinist rules.

Caste, Class and Gender

As in Sutara’s situation, the sexist nature of the caste system throws light on the fact that sexual “purity” entirely determines a Hindu *bhadra* woman’s inclusion or exclusion from the ambit of her innate high-caste identity; if the former is “defiled,” the latter is automatically stripped from her.¹⁷⁵ Critics like Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi observe that a traditionally “lower-caste” man asserts his signs of social improvement and economic success by adapting to cultural mannerisms of the “upper-caste,” and its starting point is the body of the woman.¹⁷⁶ According to Liddle and Joshi, increased upward mobility among individuals or a group is directly proportional to greater control over women’s bodies. Such control manifests through “women’s disinheritance from immovable property in the form of land, and their exclusion from productive economy, involving removal from public life to the domestic sphere of the home in

¹⁷⁵ Kalpana Kannabiran notes that because the identity of a community is constructed on the bodies of women, and proprietorial rights defined by placing them within family and community, aggression on women outside these socially accepted realms is tacitly legitimized by caste and community, and even exploited by them. According to her, rape of a woman belonging to a different caste or communal group is an “assertion of difference and separatedness and a reinforcement of the aggressor’s position in the right” (33). Class and communal factors at the level of public and political discourse create hierarchies within the universal gendered experience of women, by classifying the so-called “normal” from the “abnormal.” Moreover, the minority women are understood to be situated outside the protection of the State. In *The River Churning*, the episode of Sutara’s family being sabotaged and she being presumably raped occurs at a time-space intersection (Noakhali riots 1946), during which she is increasingly emerging as a minority and hence the communally “abnormal” female presence in East Bengal. Her passage to West Bengal is hence a journey towards attempting to become the majority among the Hindu Bengalis. However, as her “molested” body is positioned outside the familiar circles of class and caste, she is closer to the Dalits, the converts and the grassroots females, rather than the privileged-class *bhadramahila*.

¹⁷⁶ In Srinivas’ words: “...as a caste rises in hierarchy and its ways become more sanskritized, it adopts the sex and marriage code of the Brahmins. Sanskritization results in harshness towards women” (Srinivas 71). Similarly, according to Nur Yalman: “It is through women (and not men) that the ‘purity’ of the caste-community is ensured and preserved... [The] danger of low quality blood entering their caste...only exists with women” (Yalman 259). Further, Veena Das states: “If men of ritually low status were to get sexual access to women of higher status, then not only the purity of the women but that of the entire group would be endangered” (Majumdar, ed. 29).

the form of seclusion or purdah” (59).¹⁷⁷ Further, Hutton notes that stepping up in terms of caste is purely a male-centric benefit, at the cost of greater hardship for women, such that the meaning of caste practices does not apply uniformly to all members of a given group. Because the *Chandala* group originates from sexual union between a Sudra (“low-born”) man and a Brahmin (“high-born”) woman, it is ranked the lowest in the Indian caste hierarchical ladder. *Chandala* is the symptom of the greatest possible subversion of patriarchal rules that safeguard “social exclusiveness” and “biological purity.”¹⁷⁸

Although she is idealized as a domesticated “mother and wife,” the *bhadramahila*, as we saw in Chapter 2, also has every potential to emerge as a female patriarch, by consuming and propagating the (limited) power hierarchy that patriarchy has transferred to her. Sutara’s case is complex because she is born within a system of power and then downgraded from it by Partition riots. Had it been a Dalit raped woman, a straitjacket representation would have easily demonized rather than victimize her sexuality, by making her lost dignity not appear as one of the protected objects at stake on a social level. Thus, my analysis of Sutara’s misfortune also urges to look beyond her image as merely a subjugated sexual body. Her “rape” is not fully considered unless she is located within the specific upper-caste, middle-class and Hindu matrices of identity. At the same time, her way of reacting to the “rape” cannot be fully understood if it is

¹⁷⁷ In fact, as Veena Das notes, woman’s body itself is treated as man’s property. Its violation by rape is seen as “an offense against the property rights of the man who is her guardian” (Das, “Violence, Gender and Subjectivity” 292).

¹⁷⁸ In this respect, it is important to recognize the inherent paradoxes present in the *bhadramahila*’s identity. I read her situation to be similar to the domestication of the mother goddess cult from pre-Aryan indigenous culture by the Aryan patriarchal-brahminical pantheon. In Liddle and Joshi’s words: “Since the mother goddess could not be suppressed, she was finally incorporated into Brahmin ritual, but this integration could not occur without contradiction” (68). Just as idolizing the pre-Aryan goddess with a measured power of “Motherhood” meant conferring her with a prominence within the mainstream at the cost of making her relationships with class and caste Other – from which she herself had arisen – to become permanently antagonistic, so for the *bhadramahila*. In other words, by virtue of being a kin to the gentleman, *bhadramahila* is disengaged from the Dalit men and women, with whom she shares her subaltern and oppressed status.

not explored against the entire range of her sense of belonging. When combined with her privileged class-caste position, her “raped” womanhood overrules the above inferred caste-gender dualism as proposed by Liddle and Joshi. This is because if she was not a riot victim, Sutara could have re-enacted the hegemonic casteist relations. So her relegation from and subsequent reconciliation with patriarchal norms cannot be equated with that of a Dalit or a minority female victim, who, in the first place, is a doubly marginalized body, once within the family in relation to her male counterpart, and then with respect to the *bhadra* people of the nation, beyond much chances of social elevation.¹⁷⁹

Numerous feminist readings ascribe different critiques about the silence pertaining to the incident in the text, which could very likely have been Sutara’s rape.¹⁸⁰ According to Bagchi and Mookerjee-Leonard, the “unspoken” episode does not imply a “residual prudery of a post-Victorian novelist” (“Quarantined” 29). Rather, it calls to attention, in Bagchi’s words, an appraisal of the “unbearable panoptical gaze” (“Introduction” xxxii). Additionally, Mookerjee-Leonard defines the minimal presence of Sutara’s speech, between her finding employment in Delhi and her restoration in Calcutta, as a continual loss of her feminine entity, agency and dignity, which had begun with the incident of riot. Didur reads the silence associated with rape as

¹⁷⁹ According to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, the contradictory nature of citizen rights emerges from the fact that a state’s laws and policies are not only different for men and women, but also applies in ways as to create differentiation among women themselves, such as by categorizing them in terms of religious identities, “good” and “bad,” normal and deviant, working and nonworking, or child and adult. Yet, in the schema of political identity, everyone is declared to be equal (*The Scandal of the State* 2).

¹⁸⁰ While I do not zero down on the conviction that Sutara certainly was raped, the way the narrator brings out her character throughout the novel viz-a-viz her dialogues with the categories of gender, community, caste and class, agrees with the different feminist theorizations defining intentions and consequences of rape. To cite a few: “the depersonalization of women” (Winkler 1991), “the method of taming a woman who gets out of line” (Ortner and Whitehead 1981), “terror warfare” (Nordstrom and Robben 1995), an “explicitly political act, a ritual of victory, the defilement of honour and territory of the enemy community” (Agarwal 1995). Jyotirmoyee Devi’s portraying Sutara as a working woman in the labour market and yet a quarry of seclusion, and Promode’s will to marry her with the same rationale as deployed by the pan-Indian “marry-off campaigns,” subjects her, in Mookherjee’s words, to “persuasive public rhetorics,” similar to the ones associated with the “*birangonas*” of Bengal.

an attempt to redirect the gaze and hence the obsession of the reader, community and state from women's body and sexuality (Didur 13). Reminding the reader to follow Gayatri Spivak's lines in treating a "loss as loss," Didur cautions us against treating this ambiguous incident as an obvious proof of rape. She supports "the novel's refusal to 'recover' Sutara's experience within the script dictated by patriarchal nationalism" (19), thereby criticizing the very idea of "recovery." Further, referring to Jean-Francois Lyotard's philosophy about the incommensurability of facts viz-a-viz a historically and legally verifiable "truth," Paulomi Chakraborty sees it as impossible to make a woman's experience of rape meet the phallogentric rules in terms of its legal and patriarchal representation ("Violence of the Metaphor" 154). Drawing from her analyses of texts like *Clarissa* and *A Passage to India*, Sunder Rajan observes "symptoms of a deep underlying male fear that rape could be a female lie, or fiction" ("Life After Rape" 70), which vindicates the mystification that rape bears around itself. Chakraborty brings in the mythical parallel of Ahalya and Sita to understand how, emerging from the Brahminical context, the fixation with woman's purity and chastity makes a social picture of the "feared-raped" woman, whose words are hardly equipped to vouch for her own innocence. In both Sunder Rajan and Chakraborty's readings, Jyotirmoyee Devi denies handing over this authority of personal experience of a female child's trauma to the omniscient narrator's voice, rather choosing to suspend the novel in its state of crisis. Chakraborty calls this "the failure of socially possible and permissible language" (145), because the available socio-cultural rhetoric is largely gendered and hence biased.

Although reflecting comprehensively on the gendered possibilities of this zone of silence in the novel, the aforementioned critics hardly touch on Sutara's class and caste identities, both of which, in her case, make referential agreements to her *bhadra* belonging. As they judge the

silence in the ambiguous chapter of riot by imposing an interpretation of rape, there is no scope of treating Sutara's feelings outside the gendered violation and thereby readdressing her overall loss. This fallacy goes back to the omniscient narrative voice in the novel, which takes for granted the protagonist's absence of language, and makes an unqualified acceptance on behalf of every thinking reader that Sutara has indeed been raped. However, all that is said in the novel is that during the commotion, she stumbled and everything went blank, and that later Tamij *saheb* discovered her in the midst of the ruins from a bundle of blood-spattered cloth heaps (100). Even though the possibility of sexual assault cannot be altogether discarded, the critics' immediate association of blood with the juvenile female child's vaginal or sexual injury, as if by virtue of being a female, she could not have been physically assaulted otherwise, is in my mind not only doused in casual feminist sentimentality, but also arguably precipitous. Moreover, the way in which the novel silences this issue indicates a bourgeois position of the author, by preserving the language of propriety. Throughout the novel, the adult Sutara's sense of guilt and feeling of inferiority¹⁸¹ and inadequacy appears to generate from this conclusive tone on the part of the narrator, more so as Sutara never seems to clearly recall what had happened to her, and as the latter takes hold of the mental life of Sutara.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Sutara's silence can be justified in Veena Das' reflection on the memory of the abducted and raped women: "These memories were sometimes compared to poison that makes the inside of the woman dissolve...none of the metaphors used to describe the self that had become the repository of poisonous knowledge emphasized the need to give expression to this hidden knowledge" (Das, "Language and Body" 84). Further, in Das' words: "Even the idea that we should recover the narratives of violence becomes problematic when we realize that such narratives cannot be told unless we see the relation between pain and language that a culture has evolved" (88). Interviewed women by Menon, Bhasin and Das were found to perceive themselves as polluted bodies and objects of consumption (85), who had to carry "poisonous knowledge of Partition." For more, also see Butalia's "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition;" Menon and Bhasin's "Surviving Violence: Some Reflections on Women's Experience of Partition;" Menon and Bhasin's "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition."

¹⁸² Her memory lapse can be seen in terms of Pierre Janet's theory of survival tactic for extreme childhood trauma, in which the traumatizing memory is split off from the victim's consciousness, or as Janice Haaken explains the

Like the narrator, the scholars too delimit Sutara's refugee experience to her gender, which is but a fractioned part of her identity. They ignore the male-formulated construct of caste within which a female body is located just by virtue of its birth among a certain clique. This approach, in a way, reserves the class and caste-based agency only for the males, such that the likelihood of class and caste-based setbacks can only be associated with masculine defeat and nostalgia. Consequently, Sutara's right to be recognized as a refugee from a *bhadra* status on equal terms as her fellow male refugees hailing from similar caste-class background is foiled. My reading counters the feminist versions that see violence being inflicted only on the sexual entity of the female, and which therefore do not account for other kinds of damages that a woman might undergo.¹⁸³

Many critics agree that the loss of a refugee man and a refugee woman are not weighed similarly. For instance, Nayanika Mookherjee observes that the sentiment of sorrow is built differently around male and female war victims. While the pain of a father or brother of a raped

functioning of "dual consciousness": "...an amnesic barrier protecting one part of the personality from knowledge of the abuse" (Haaken 1075).

¹⁸³ Samaresh Basu's short story "The Woman Who Sold Wares" is about how, in the jobless post-Partition milieu of Calcutta, the male hawkers blurt sexual innuendos to the only female hawker out of sheer professional jealousy, in order to sideline her. From the beginning of the narrative, while these men claim themselves to be the struggling actors of history, they see the young woman to be as if exterior to this masculine narrative, and embedded in her physical entity pivoted around her beautiful hair. Basu makes a commendable statement through the plotline – while initially, this woman is censured in the male-dominated public spaces of train and station for "shamelessly" venturing to earn money in a profession traditionally monopolized by men, and her identity of "saleswoman-hood" castigated by the collective male gaze raising questions about her character, virginity and marital status, in the end, by suffering a stay in the prison along with other hawkers, she is permitted entrée into the discourse of the "man's world," whose language is necessarily hypermasculine. From the "doll's mother without the doll's father" – a name that she had earned on account of selling handmade rag dolls – she is espoused as a comrade within the hawker's team. Unlike Jyotirmoyee Devi's *bhadramahila* protagonist Sutara, Basu's protagonist, while secretly aspiring for marriage, is not obsessed about being identified only as a pitiable and vulnerable woman. She demands and finally acquires respect as a blue-collar worker without any *bhadralok* to "embellish" her identity, and is not classified by her gender or class, but only by her labour. Incidentally, like Sutara, she also hails from a *bhadralok* background – her father being a village schoolmaster, so it is a path-breaking journey on her part to establish herself as a "female hawker" – an unprecedented phenomenon – by defying more familiar and "suitable" images of "lady passenger" or hair oil company's "ad girl," by which the public expects to recognize her.

woman is “emphasized as part of the nationalist commemoration of the war” (45), the female loss is localized in relational terms – a sorrowful widow, mother and sister. War and civil disruptions frequently cultivate the expressive imagery of “patriotic motherhood” (Ardener and Holden 1987, quoted in Mookherjee 45) and “an ever ready womb” (Cooke 1996, quoted in Mookherjee 45) sending sons and husbands to combat zones. In the same way, while the tragedy pertaining to loss of material possessions is uniformly associated with male members, a woman’s tragedy is mostly hinged around her body. In Indian society, a woman is not usually associated with the rights of acquired assets, such as home or landed property. This draws on Sara Suleri’s observation: “Men live in homes, and women live in bodies” (1989:143, quoted in Krishnendu Ray 2722). Moreover, P.K. Dutta notes that the rhetoric of female militancy and conditioned physical discipline as applied nation-wide against the pervasive furore of abduction and rape, does not prevent the offhand approach of limiting women’s capacity only to their corporal faculty. In his words:

...by locating women in a tight dialectic between their sexual vulnerability and physical self-protection, they were discouraged from situating themselves in the context of other political issues, that is, from seeing themselves in relationship to roles other than their simple sexual being. Via abductions, Hindu communalism strictly bounded the whole question of gender by sexuality (76).

If one interprets that Sutura is, after all, not raped, does her magnitude of trouble become any less? She is orphaned by the riots, and is in turn rejected by her existing natal family, if not on grounds of sexual impurity then because she has spent days in a Muslim neighbour’s household. Her homestead is burnt down, which means that in the absence of her father who has been murdered, she, among her other siblings, also incurs the responsibility of refurbishing the class-caste prestige associated with her family name. This can only be done through re-accumulation of social and economic capital, which has been traditionally accepted as a parameter of

bhadralok identity. While constantly fighting against the odds, Sutara not only embalms her wounded femininity, but also grapples to rebuild on her middle-class and upper-caste facilities that have been razed by Partition. Therefore, one can read the novel by examining various other under-explored themes viz-a-viz Sutara's subjugation after migrating to India, despite her being as educated, culturally accomplished and economically stable as her male counterpart. As I illustrate below, the proclamation of Jyotirmoyee Devi's authorial power over Sutara's voice and entity begins at the level of narration and autonomy of expression, which is no less a form of dominance than the one supposedly meted out on the latter's sexual body.

Trauma and Narrative Voice

Throughout the narrative, the omniscient narrator controls Sutara's experiences. Sutara's testimony is interrupted through a constant coexistence of the narrator's persona, which appears to be invisible by virtue of being everywhere in the text. Because the narrator shares her feminist assumptions and position with the author, I see them as a single identity. While the narrator talks from within the frame of the plot, the author sustains the narrator from outside the frame with socio-historico-mythical evidence. Because of their interchangeable function, in the subsequent discussions, I shall call the narrator as author-narrator. Moreover, rather than a narrator and a character, I find Jyotirmoyee Devi and Sutara's relationship more explainable in terms of Laub's description of the victim and the listener. As a "listener," the author-narrator construes the victim's introspections and claims to feel her "victories, defeats and silences" (Laub 58), thereby fashioning out a Sutara through unchallenged understanding, and leaving little scope for the reader to understand the protagonist. In creating Sutara, Jyotirmoyee Devi attempts to "listen"¹⁸⁴ to a collective voice of trauma survivors, who are, as Laub explains, represented as the passive

¹⁸⁴ I use "listening" in the sense of listener reproducing the unspoken past.

bearers of incidents without any comprehension of the memory. This knowledge of collective trauma supplies the basic rohstoff in Jyotirmoyee Devi's text. Rohstoff is the raw subject matter garnered for writing a text at a primary level. The material for rohstoff is provided by the factual, contemporary society.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, stoff is the selective literarization of raw facts gathered from the society in the form of rohstoff. Stoff further sieves the randomly accumulated matter in the rohstoff, which would finally contribute towards making a text.¹⁸⁶ The author-narrator's stoff in the novel is formed, by adapting female Partition victims' isolated, stray and what I would call "raw" feelings about this holocaust into a coherent and organized postcolonial feminist ethos centred on rape survivors, which she applies on Sutara's character. Sutara, as the author depicts her, is, thus, not merely an individual fictive product, but the prototype of female victimhood during the Partition. Her experiences are induced with the author-narrator's stock proposition, as the latter appropriates her personal memory for the purpose of etching a convenient subjective conception of the past.

In the text, the author-narrator is not only able to externally observe and comment on the "whats" and "hows" of Sutara's actions, but also the "whys," including her inner dilemmas, even when Sutara does not express them aloud.¹⁸⁷ This requires delving into Sutara's mind, which,

¹⁸⁵ While rohstoff is extrinsic in nature stoff is intrinsic. At the same time, stoff is an elusive and imaginative concept, which cannot be completely unfolded in reality. This is because stoff cannot be concretized fully either by an author or a reader, as there is always more to a given event than an individual's replication of it. A reader's imagination, for example, can surpass an author's stoff, if s/he can accomplish a greater amount of rohstoff than is available in a text's content. The desire to create a grand narrative works behind an author's force of documenting a stoff, but it cannot be realized in actuality.

¹⁸⁶ I am indebted to Sujit Kumar Mandal's class lecture notes delivered in Jadavpur University, Kolkata, for the concepts of rohstoff and stoff.

¹⁸⁷ This can be supported with examples from all over the text: "Why did it happen? The question was uppermost in her mind, she who was still too young to understand the whys and hows of such things" (11)... "...what happened next was so deeply etched in Sutara's memory that even now she recalled every word of it and flushed with humiliation" (36); "All she remembered was her middle-aged father's last words,..." (111); "But stray, unconnected thoughts filled her mind, going round and round in circles" (132).

unlike her speech, is not silent. The narrative, thus, proceeds, not only through the narrator's demonstration of Sutara's actions, but by making (predetermined) inferences about her particular thoughts. This is not to say that what the author-narrator conjectures is wrong. But Sutara's presence is as if only meant to fulfil the latter's purpose of describing the stock impasse of "The Refugee Victimized Woman." The author-narrator uses her general view on "Raped Refugee Womanhood" to comprehend and construct Sutara's specific context. Consequently, all through the plot, Sutara remains an authorial brainchild, who is yet to become a self-complete individual.

Such authorial intervention engages Sutara's experiences to serve the same function as Favorini's definition of collective memory: "a set of recollections, repetitions and recapitulations that are socially, morally or politically useful for a group or community" (quoted in Hunt 98-99). Its contemplated usage is not really a reverse of the historical memory of Partition. In Hunt's words, "Historical memory provides a social framework for the functioning of the individual memory" (99). The author-narrator's conflation of Sutara with the nationalistic historical discourses is realized in the way she provides standardized opinions about refugee women, raped women, caste and communal affairs and the meaning of Hindu marriage, while describing the latter's journey. The novel is selectively informed by gendered thoughts about woman's body and man-woman relationship, which are made prevalent through popularized social interactions in the postcolonial Indian nation-state.

Regarding traumatic experience, Dori Laub observes that "massive trauma precludes its registration..." (Laub 57). Cathy Caruth also states that "...it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (Caruth 17). On the other hand, the listener, in simultaneous awareness of the victim's consciousness and her own reality, functions as the "enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its

process and of its momentum” (Laub 58). Yet, Laub also remarks that a historian, a listener and an interviewer should respect, and not trespass the subtle balance between what the victim knows and what she did not or could not know (61). The listener can pick up cues from the silent zones of victim’s reminiscence, without making “foregone conclusions and preconceived dismissals” (61). Contrarily, in *The River Churning*, I see Jyotirmoyee Devi’s role as a listener crossing the admissible threshold, as she takes away Sutara’s individual agency (albeit fictive), allowing the reader to reach Sutara only through the author-narrator’s oversimplified reading. The “cues” that she uses in understanding Sutara transcends Sutara’s precise thoughts, and in its place establishes the writer’s prearranged reflection on female refugee-ness. Like an epic character, Sutara’s existence is tied to an *a priori* meaning, which she cannot escape at any rate and which she ought to accomplish.

Given this pattern, the author-narrator’s assumption of hermeneutic freedom and mediation occurs at the cost of cutting down the imaginable layers in Sutara’s character. This “hermeneutic freedom” especially emerges from Jyotirmoyee Devi occasionally superimposing her own experience as a self-conscious widowed aristocrat woman¹⁸⁸ on the “raped” village girl Sutara’s character. That the riot victim does not express her feelings in an “I” mode of narration, and the novel does not open directly with her testimony but with a background of Hinduized feminist theoretical corpus is, according to me, problematic. In this way, the author-narrator predisposes the reader’s mind with her own impression of “Rape Victim” from an elitist position, rather than trying to grasp the specific situation of an orphaned middle-class refugee girl. As one finds bits and pieces of Jyotirmoyee Devi’s personal realizations (as presented in “Beginnings”) resurfacing in Sutara’s character, it is not wrong to say that rather than moving her authorial Self

¹⁸⁸ She confesses being persistently uncomfortable about making male acquaintances outside family or about publishing her writings (“Beginnings” xix-xx, xxiii).

into Sutara's shoes, she is defining Sutara through her personal Self. In other words, "Sutara" is a hypothesis formed by a writer belonging to an altogether different class-social reality, who asserts from her own experience that women are *always* friendless and their entire life is a struggle ("Beginnings" viii). Jyotirmoyee Devi's tendency of replicating herself in Sutara's character is particularly doubtful, as the rural everyday for an Indian woman is very different from her urban counterpart.

Nigel C. Hunt observes:

...owing to our social nature, our individual narratives are determined not only by how we think, our own memories of our experiences, but also by others, and by the social discourses that exist in society. Individuals do not have a single narrative; the narrative depends on the audience (97-98).

In the interpretive gap between Sutara's experiences and the audiences' understanding of those experiences stands the forceful presence of Jyotirmoyee Devi's "Narrative." Such a "Narrative" takes on from the fact that Sutara fails to be a thinking and articulating subject. At another place, Hunt contends: "...without memory we are nothing. If we do not remember the past we have no structured life" (96). As Sutara cannot overtly recall or express her knowledge of the riot, her silence becomes an intellectual property for the narrator, who informs the reader about the happenings without any resistance from Sutara's counter-narrative. The kitsch present in this dominant narrative diminishes Sutara into an inert female Partition victim lacking any challenging character dimension. The incidents narrated in the plot are distorted twice – once in Sutara's traumatized memory, and secondly by Jyotirmoyee Devi's ideologically trimming them to fit *bhadra* parameters, in the power-position of a bourgeois author-narrator. Because the testimony of pain comes in third person, it becomes second-handed. This difficulty could be resolved, if Sutara played an interventionist role in her own "story." Because she does not do so,

the absence of the omniscient narrator means a virtual death of Sutara's thought processes, and drowning of her persona into an irretrievable muteness.

Sutara's parents' accidental death in the Noakhali riot had left her nurturing and training into a prospective *bhadramahila* half-way complete. At the stage she is orphaned, her random spontaneous desires of girlhood are still on full swing. This becomes visible, as she remembers her Hindu playmates and she herself greedily wanting to partake the taste of fruits that were half-eaten by their Muslim friends, but refraining from doing so, lest they be caught in the act by their respective families. This minor recollection points to the still-unsettled disputes of "right" and "wrong" in a young mind, which is yet to be effectively turned into bias against the other community. However, the narrator devotes very little narrative space to the juvenile Sutara's mental-scape, leaving the latter's immediate reaction and contemplations vague after the riots, and instead projects her only through the grown-up Sutara Dutta's refined sensitivity and retrospection. One can speculate that between these two stages, a lot of Sutara's Self that is deemed irrelevant in her final construction as a "Refugee Woman," is eliminated.¹⁸⁹ This speculation also goes back to my observation in Chapter 2, where Doya's village neighbours and Maa similarly attempt to step up the process of her becoming a *bhadramahila*, by trying to suppress her childish waywardness. Like Doya's villagers and family, the narrator's attitude too is authoritative in a patriarchal sense. She exclusively uses the soon-to-become-*bhadramahila*

¹⁸⁹ Jasodhara Bagchi notes that the archetype of the newly rising middle-class woman in India, who was designated as *bhadramahila* in Bengal, had overlooked the role of a girl child, by over-emphasizing on the construction of an ideal femininity that could crucially reproduce class relations. Unlike the acculturated and affected womanly virtues and skills, the short-lived phase of a "girl-hood" was not considered worth of recording and analysis. The feminine games and literature created specifically for the girl child's consumption were all symbolic of the imminent double burden of a carefully gendered education and housekeeping that she henceforth would have to take up as a *bhadramahila*. Her well-protected upbringing, controlled reading of only the "suitable" books, and exemption from physical agility – all contributed towards a quick deletion and replacement of her pre-feminine infancy with a consciously feminized gentlewoman-hood.

Sutara's perspective for justifying the thesis of her novel on victimized women. As a result, there is an intentional screening of a vital dimension of the protagonist's character. Here, Jyotirmoyee Devi can be identified with the narrator in power, who, according to Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, recounts certain memories while silencing others in such a way as to set limitations about the "speakable" and the "unspeakable" past (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 1107). This distinction is a way of avoiding "troubling" aspects of the past which are hard to share, thereby making the past "bland and uncontroversial" (1111). As I argue above, the chance for selective projection of Sutara's character would be less, if she herself was handed the authority of controlling her own narrative in the first person. Andre Brink points out that memory, like narrative, is "constructed around its own blind spots and silences" (Brink 37); additionally, Michael Schudson states that in an "effort not to report the past but to make it interesting, narratives simplify" (Schudson 354-355). In the same way, the author-narrator brings about Sutara's metamorphosis, without much regard for her possible complex perspective as a rural East Bengali girl-child.

According to Hunt:

In order to successfully process the traumatic recollections, trauma victims must recognise the meaning of their suffering. This is not a matter of reverting to a former state, but an acceptance that things are permanently changed, and thus a learning experience (163).

In Sutara's case, the narrative silence prevents the reader from knowing how much she actually comes to terms with her devastating past. Because there is no scope of opening up the wounds within the limits of the novel, there is no scope of sewing them up either. Because Sutara does not make a conscious effort to talk about the facts of the past, there can be no chance of unlearning or overcoming them in the true sense. What Ardener and Holden (*Images of Women in Peace and War*) perceive as the symbolic use of body by those lacking an effective political

voice, such as the subalterns of a given social arrangement, is unavailable in case of Sutara. Her persona, since the time she is recovered, is inside-out hushed up.¹⁹⁰ Such narratorial attempt at times gets exaggerated enough to conceal her mentalscape, not to say her latent dreamscape. Caruth observes that one's own trauma is tied up to another's trauma, and that trauma itself leads to listening to other's wound (8). However, while one can surmise that Jyotirmoyee Devi's own consciousness as an immigrant writer finds an outlet from "listening" to Sutara's painful experiences, similar option is not available in case of Sutara. Because Sutara cannot wholeheartedly express her feelings even among the fellow Punjabi refugee women, but is someone who knows about other's tribulations as well as her own, she, instead, becomes a medium of accruing tragic knowledge. What Hunt calls the "meaning of their suffering" is compactly taped up between Sutara and the author-narrator, so disremembering the trauma is definitely not a goal that the novel sets before itself. Arlene Stein's concept of interpersonal process of denial ("As Far as They Knew I Came from France"), which can help avoid pain, trauma, shame and stigma, can also be applied in understanding the tacit agreement of silence between the author-narrator and her character.

Paulomi Chakraborty observes that by mentioning the Noakhali riot incident in an early part of the storyline, Jyotirmoyee Devi makes a departure from the typical succession of episodes, where rape marks the climax. However, Sutara's mindset and character do not undergo any significant change throughout the length of the plot. According to Caruth, response to trauma

¹⁹⁰ She is very unlike the Dalit female protagonist in Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi," who refuses to be clothed after being gang-raped and hence rejects the compulsory invisibility imposed on her state of woe. In deriving the tribal name Dopdi from the classical-mythical name Draupadi, Mahasweta Devi makes a clear contrast as well as deconstruction and reconstruction of the latter. While Godly intervention prevented the classical Draupadi's public stripping, who is also a singular incident of polyandry in the patronymic epic context, the monogamous Dopdi Majhen is gangraped by the police for being a Santhal informer-activist of the naxalites. Through her exposed body, Dopdi articulates the unutterable ugly and cruel truth, thereby also placing her situation in ironic juxtaposition with the classical character of Draupadi (Dwivedi n.p.).

can be delayed, uncontrolled as well as appear in the form of repetitive hallucinations (11). On the other hand, in Sutara's case, a brooding introspection and self-doubt bars any acceptance of her current image as a spinster and a teacher, even to herself. In fact, her state of marginality deepens because of her not confronting the ideas of "centre" and "margin," and instead longing to revert "to a former state" (Hunt 102). A happy marriage of bourgeois principles in the end is clearly foreseeable to the narrator, if not to the insulated character of Sutara. Hence, all the incidents that take place between the episode of "rape" and Sutara's union with Promode are projected by the author-narrator as anomalous and temporary distractions from the "regular," not new and radical grounds to lead up to a differently oriented life and Selfhood altogether. The Noakhali riots never become Sutara's past. The incident remains the referential point of her pain, until there is a future promising to bring her back at least the status-quo from her pre-riot *bhadralok* East Bengali past, if not something better.

By not betraying any oddity of her individual personality, Sutara is a suspiciously smooth fit-in to the case of the "Abandoned Refugee Woman." As the key character, she can only deliver her own dialogue, but the import of her dialogue transpires through the prompting by the author-narrator. This is a major drawback for a female lead in a text emphasizing feminist perspectives of Partition. Jyotirmoyee Devi's characterisation becomes secondary to the "Cause" she wants to advance through her writing. Sutara lacks every imaginable foible or limitation, which usually defines human conditions. In the entire plotline about her "fall" followed by her "resurgence," she obediently abides by the bourgeois hackneyed ideals of the *bhadralok*-dom, cutting out all chances of excess – erotic, intellectual or emotional. Seen this way, her meeting the ultimate goal of "revival" and "victory" is not accomplished through active engagement of her agency, and is thus an achievement essentially extrinsic to her being. By extrinsic, what I mean is that rather

than a struggle for change coming from within Sutara, her cocooned Self is greatly dependent on the middle-class social influences that would reward her a “compensation” for her conscientious and submissive behaviour. The silence, after a while, therefore, features less as a consequence of trauma and more as a choice to remain politically correct, in order to be eventually taken up within the caucus of those people that she deems to be her “judges.”

Flavia Agnes explains how the patriarchal mind-set in postcolonial India draws clear lines between “good” and “bad” women, and decides whether a survivor of rape deserves to be sympathised with or not, depending on how the victim herself addresses the issue of “lost honour.”¹⁹¹ She notes:

We hate those who survive to tell their tales of violations. Those who wish to live beyond the frame of victimhood, live life on their own terms, with their heads held high. The real women with a zest for life, with their sexualized bodies (n.p.).

A rape victim is encouraged to live a life of anonymity, not come out and speak up in public about her traumatizing experience, and thereby “is doomed to live a closeted existence, the memory of the incident must be her constant companion” (n.p.). It is also assumed that the incident of rape is so insurmountable in her life that “she cannot have an existence beyond this” (n.p.). Ideally, a rape victim’s “honour” can only be restored in her death, when she overcomes

¹⁹¹ This is a discussion pertaining to the two gang-rape cases in India in the recent times – the rape of Nirbhaya in New Delhi in a private bus (December 2012), the fatal nature of which later claimed the victim’s life, and the rape of Suzette Jordan in Kolkata (February 2012), who died of meningoencephalitis in the course of the court trials. The author observes how both the public and the juridical system of India have reacted very differently to the two victims – while Nirbhaya’s hastened death has idealized her “case” and drawn in much public rage and sentiment, forcing the offenders to be speedily punished, Suzette has been looked down upon both in common perception and by the government officials, and even been referred to as a “public woman,” because she waived her right to anonymity in June 2013, raising fundamental questions as to why she should hide her identity and be ashamed of an incident that she had not given rise to. The national sentiment working in the “Nirbhaya Case” can be realized from the media’s initiative in making television shows, such as the BBC documentary titled “India’s Daughter,” which was broadcast in the UK on 4 March 2015. Nirbhaya’s death and thereby unavailability to speak has nationally re-imaged her as the archetypal submissive “daughter,” who needs to be spoken for and defended by the Indian males. Jordan evaded such prosaic meaning of victimhood, by choosing to become a women’s rights activist and counselor for victims of sexual and domestic violence. The social unacceptability of Suzette seeing herself as an agent rather than an object is realized in the nonchalance on the part of the court, where the main suspect in her rape remains scot-free.

the physical injury and becomes an immortalized memory and a symbol of pity. The larger society considers discussions about rape permissible, only as long as the victim does not talk about the wrong done to her but tolerates objectifying public gaze and accumulation of fictive narratives around the incident, and as soon as the rape can be iconified within a frame of set stereotypes. The most prevalent method of coercive immortalization of a rape victim is through the denial and erasure of “the memory of her ordinariness” (Agnes n.p.). She is made to become an abstract idea outside of the normal bodily desires and everyday pleasures, which do not exist in reality other than for the common people’s imaginations about the victim. By re-domesticating the once-exposed body of the rape victim within the national-familial coordinates of “daughter and daughter-in-law,” she is magnanimously claimed back as a conserved national property. Agnes, however, warns that such fervor for justice and protest against the perpetrator by the paternal nation applies only to those victims, who do not overthrow the popular knowledge about rape by openly sharing their own version, or who allow their image to be “sanitized, rendered into a blemishless sacrificial goat” (n.p.). Additionally, if the victim’s habitat is located in an urban, upper echelon of the society and cushioned by economic stability, women in general tend to identify more with her “case.” It is highly probable for a Dalit or minority woman to be raped and maimed, and be cogently passed for a falsely accusing offender rather than a victim.¹⁹² Agnes’ ideas can, thus, be compared with Jyotirmoyee Devi’s figuration of Sutara as the epitome of Partition sexual violence, who is circumscribed by a silence most suitable to the patriarchal imaginings of a “good woman.” It is not wrong to speculate that *The River Churning*’s survival

¹⁹² For more on how Dalit *adivasi* (indigenous) women are treated by the police and the law, see “The Relevance of Kawasi Hidme’s Unheard Story”: <https://arunferreira.wordpress.com/2015/05/03/the-relevance-of-kawasi-hidmes-unheard-story-by-sushmita-verma-art-by-sushmita/>

as one of the recognized Bengal Partition novels is owing to its protagonist's compliant character.

It is also worth inquiring how a text, which is dedicated "to the tortured and exploited women of all ages and lands" and in which, the author-narrator claims to focus on the feminist side of Partition, so readily gives in (or rather, allows the protagonist to give in) to the logic that rape is the same as the loss of a woman's "honour," "dignity" and "chastity." In such sexualisation of the female sense of honour and confining it *only* to her status of being virgin until she is married to a man, "honour" is reckoned through certain preconditioned social factors such as monogamy, or in other words, the transference of her reproductive faculty from one safe familial niche to another, and her unconditioned obedience to upkeep it. Remaining hidebound by this definition of "honour" and its corresponding sense of "loss," the "triumph" in the end of the novel lies in finally reclaiming what Sutara had been earlier declared to have lost in the opening of the plot – her allegedly most valuable asset, "Honour." It disregards every other form of compromise, if not dishonour, that Sutara brings herself to bear in the process of this retrieval. For instance, it is a compromise on her part not to revisit her native village in East Pakistan, because such a retreat to an Islamic nation-state might disrupt the process of her becoming a veritable *bhadramahila*. By avoiding Tamij *saheb*'s family's invitation, Sutara reinforces the patriarchal conviction that women, being symbols of domestic purity and containers of territorial borderlines within their bodies, should not enter the Other community's inner circle. At the same time, by cutting off her connection with her natal home and village, Sutara abides by the stock image of the middle-class Hindu woman, who has no sense of entitlement to her paternal

properties.¹⁹³ Moreover, in allowing Promode to consider that her professional status is a pointless burden, she compromises her ethics and rationality as a teacher. Finally, as I elaborate in the next section, by rejecting Tamij *saheb*'s son Azizuddin for Promode, and thus an amiable Muslim family for a retrograde Hindu family, she allows dishonour of human relationships, disregarding the love of old friends, protectors and neighbours, in the process of looking for a citizenry and Hinduized pedigree within the unwelcoming Indian nation-state. As she redeems "Honour" by being thus dishonoured in so many other ways, the glory attached to her "victory" is clearly dimmed.

The author-narrator's purported feminist stance in the novel also suffers a setback by the prejudiced characterizations of the females in the storyline. While the women in Sutara's sister-in-law's household are invariably all depicted as narrow-minded female patriarchs, men like Promode and Amulya *babu* take on the missionary legacy of the generous, free-thinking educated males, acting to correct and thereby elevate the unkind mind-set of the former. Sutara's eventual restoration in the *bhadramahila*'s position therefore does not carry any optimistic feminist innuendo. It is sympathetically bestowed to her by the pioneers of new patriarchy, in the process of showing reason to and prevailing over the orthodox women, who have been ideologically shaped by old patriarchal values.¹⁹⁴ New patriarchs are a select Western-educated,

¹⁹³ Sutara's outlook can be explained in terms of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) attitude towards women, which defends differences in inheritance rights of sons and daughters on grounds that equal rights to inheritance would fragment family landholdings (Basu, "Hindu Women's Activism in India" 178). In her case too, like in the BJP's political ideology, regulation of feminine sexuality goes hand in hand with Hindu conservatism.

¹⁹⁴ Debali Mookerjee-Leonard studies how Orientalist historiographers, such as William Jones, N.D. Halhed and H.T. Colebrook have defined a civilizational discourse of eulogized traits of the Hindu woman, which also applies to the *bhadramahila*, resulting in a postulating of Hinduism's racial and cultural supremacy over Islam. With revisions and modernizations, the nationalists had remodelled and legitimized this tradition, such that there was hardly much conflict between the doctrinaire and the contemporary practices. The nationalist obsession about women's education had consciously made a departure from the Western parameters of culture, by maintaining the inner-outer dichotomy and separation of roles along lines of gender identities, sieving out the elite female's sense of

socio-politically conscious and supposedly liberal body of men in postcolonial India, whose origin goes back to the colonial period. The feminist stance fails, since such “generous” men are not shown in their true self-contradictory colours and their “missions” are taken at face-value. It is never probed why there is a sudden disjuncture between the “old” and the “new” patriarchal rules, and what kind of irony is constituted in the fact that while the men defend the modern patriarchal tenets, the semi-literate household women still follow the vestiges of obsolete practices. In other words, the protean image-forming ploys of the *bhadralok*, which mark a given practice as norm one day only to call it a superstition later, is never opposed by the narrator. To elaborate my point, in one instance of the novel, these women are depicted as hard-core Muslim haters and advocates of untouchability, whereas Amulya *babu* is the epitome of goodwill, who moderates the discussion by reminding them how Hindus would occasionally eat food cooked by the Muslims. The current postcolonial circumstance in Jyotirmoyee Devi’s novel renders a very sophisticated version of patriarchy, which seems to have moved on from caste and communal prejudices, leaving those to be dealt with by the womenfolk. The new patriarchy appears to be oblivious of and also absolves itself of the historic patriarchal complicities in the making of the caste system as well as in striking up communal feuds. As “salvaging the nation” is only what new patriarchy seems to concentrate on in the present day, these divisive practices are swiftly transferred in the share of the lesser modern *bhadramahila*, whereas the *bhadralok* goes on to play her edifying, more enlightened counterpart. The author’s appreciative stand for these males, thus, does not get into the commentary as to how the gendered sense of power and control basically limns the new patriarch in the shadow of his forefathers.

refinement from the uneducated Dalits, the older generations and the European women. The underlying motive of patriarchy in this exclusive treatment of the *bhadramahila* class was to cause a fracture in the prospects of a unified pan-Indian feminine identity. For more, see Mookerjee-Leonard’s “Disenfranchised Bodies.”

Sutara, a Partition Tragedy Explained through “Hindu-ness”

By drawing reference to the silenced chapter of “Stree Parva” in the *Mahabharata* and censuring the androcentric “ink” with which the epic is written, Jyotirmoyee Devi in the “Author’s Note” instantly chooses the available trope of Hinduism, drawing an analogy between the insulted women of Dwarka and the abused Partition victim Sutara.¹⁹⁵ As Subhoranjan Dasgupta points out, the author merges Sutara’s experience-wizened age with *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dwapar* and *Kali yugs* (ages). Opening her novel with the line: “...in no other country since the *Mahabharata* has history given an account of Stree Parva” (1), she makes the *Mahabharata* the core text containing universal gender meanings. Her understanding of women’s pathos cannot divorce the paradigm of religion, which accounts for why Sutara would henceforth in the novel remain, more than anything else, an insulted *Hindu* woman in search of roots. Had she been part of a different community or caste to which the “Stree Parva” of the *Mahabharata* is not available as a ready oral myth or religious discourse, would her crisis be articulated differently? By opening the novel with allusions to a text which is not symmetrically accessed by all Indians because of differences in their caste, class and religion, Jyotirmoyee Devi, despite criticizing the *Mahabharata*, describes female angst in terms of patriarchal social divisions. Conjuring Sutara’s suffering as a sequel of the mythical Hindu women’s humiliation eliminates the chance of her empathizing with the Dalit or the Muslim raped woman, making her knowledge of agony an exclusive possession of the upper-caste Hindu coterie.

¹⁹⁵ The author’s way of saying that the Yadu clan’s women were attacked by “robbers” and “bandits” in a “land bereft of men” (“Author’s Note” xxxiv) has a touch of xenophobia, which in the present day can be identified with communalism.

Dasgupta reads Sutara's going on pilgrimage to Hardwar¹⁹⁶ as a "temporary relief" (15), and in Jyotirmoyee Devi's words, it signifies "...a lonely soul trying to find companionship among strangers" (95). Whether or not aiming at a religious discharge, Sutara's opting to go on this pilgrimage and associating with a group of fellow Hindu pilgrims, rather than visiting her Muslim friends in East Pakistan, indicates that the alliances she makes are not arbitrary, but are based on her imagination of a model community, with which she would like to affiliate herself. The intentional Hindu meaning of this entire procedure of holy journey can be further realized by the fact that the names of Sutara's companions, such as Sita Bhargav, Trilochan Kumari, Janaki Bai, Ganga Behn and Kaushalyavati, are located in superlative feminine notions of Hindu mythologies. Through her choice of companions, she connects only with religion-based and class-based identity groups, such as the Punjabi women who experienced similar kinds of victimization during Partiton. By this, Sutara confirms her ability to role-play the "keeper of tradition" in agreement with the in-group behaviour of elite women, who are cut off from other castes and religions.¹⁹⁷ She personifies the politicized expressions of gendered thoughts, as suggested by the misogynist Hindu philosophies of *Manava dharmashastra*.¹⁹⁸ For a post-

¹⁹⁶ According to mythologies, Hardwar is the abode of *Shiva*, one of the main deities of Hinduism. In the novel, Sutara connects to the Punjabi and the Jat women through rituals like Satyanarayan and the common fable of *Satyapir*, which is recited both in Bengal and Punjab. The narrator's purpose of bringing these women together is to evoke tales of Partition miseries as well as belief and disbelief in God, especially in the colour of Hindu victimhood. The women's conversation matches the nationalist discourse, where Pakistan in the post-Partition period was signified as the abductor country that had supposedly kept back about two thousand Hindu women in its custody, whereas India pictured itself as the parent-protector nation, through traits of its ancient "tradition" of chivalry towards women and fierce protection of their honour (Menon, "Reproducing the Legitimate Community" 19).

¹⁹⁷ Throughout the novel, the narrator, through Sutara's and sometimes through Moinuddin's character, voices the opinion that one's identity cannot be divorced from the innate religion, caste, beliefs and society (89, 98).

¹⁹⁸ *Manava dharmashastra* or Laws of Manu are based on the tenets of Sage Bhrigu. Its "divine" teachings are, however, also believed to have been created under Lord *Brahma's* (The Hindu God worshipped as the creator of the universe) authorship. In the modern times, *Manava dharmashastra's* reverence towards Brahmins and despicable attitude towards the women and the Sudras ("lower-castes"/Dalits), who were considered inept for

Partition riot survivor, her tendency of community-building is in conflict with her victim's image.

In Hardwar, Sutara's taking a dip in the holy water of Rishikesh along with other Punjabi, Khatri and Rajasthani women becomes similar to the self-cleansing act of *jauhar* by non-Muslim women, an act performed for fear of losing their chastity. Such obsession for refinement binds these women from different parts of India, not only in terms of their religion, but also as members of a certain ethos that supports the idea of bodily honour as being higher than any other prerogative. The religious symbology overtaking corporeal spontaneity is especially prominent in the scene where women are told to clasp pillars and chains fixed on posts, and the group actually hold hands while bathing together, for fear that the "carnival atmosphere" created by the "rushing torrents" might "whisk the bather away" (106).

The author makes a twin attempt by drawing a parallel between Sutara's journey and the episode of *Mahaprasthan* (the Great Journey) in the *Mahabharata* – thus mythologizing the protagonist's sensibility of current real time in terms of a Hindu theological framework, and rendering a historicism to the myths by overlapping them with modern spatio-temporal consciousness. As Mookerjee-Leonard asserts, the symbols of *Sita*, *Savitri* and *Sati* imply the "ideal" Hindu feminine characteristics of docility, devotion and chastity, which accept strict male supervision as a second nature on their sexuality. Such a notion of womanhood upholds the husband's right as the supreme controller of the wife's body, who makes it reproduce future male citizen-subjects, disposes it to these subjects' nurturing and guards it in order to ensure its unflinching monogamy. By not transgressing the traits of ideal upper-class/caste Wife and Mother

reading the holy Vedas, have been subjected to much criticism. Before converting to Buddhism, Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar burnt *Manusmriti* (the earliest recorded work on Hindu *Dharmashastra* by Manu) to protest against the Hindu divisive practices.

through her sexual fidelity, and, in fact, penancing to negate the “contamination” that has forcefully been imposed on her body, Sutara prepares to submit herself before the encoded and nationally sanctioned virtues. Her constant clinging on to an ideal behaviour, made available by conservative Hindu prescriptions, and a tenacious loyalty towards the long-suffering yet “good woman’s” image such as the one depicted in the Hindu mythical heroines, tends to make conformist supplications, in order to be permitted re-entry among *bhadra* circles. This can be understood in reference to the *bhajan* (devotional song) lyrics that particularly draws her attention: “Watch your steps with care. The way is difficult, you may be *led astray*. Despite the *hurdles*, you have to keep going, it might be *slippery*, but still...” (94, emphasis mine). The underlying meaning in words like *astray*, *hurdles* and *slippery* is twofold – the social vulnerability of an innocent guardian-less female on the one hand, and the lure of promiscuity innate within her physical nature in the absence of moral guards, on the other. By allowing a long-since cut-off web of “own people” or family to determine her sexual behaviour or possible latent desires, Sutara acquiesces to the concepts of masculine aggression and female passivity, both of which are unquestioned key aspects of a heteronormative bourgeois society.

The recurrent analogy of mythical characters with Sutara is a means of fortifying her “intrinsic worth,” in order to locate her within a “*bhadra*” model of citizenship. P.K. Dutta observes: “More generally, idealizing images of the assertive woman emphasized desexualized role” (71). Thus, the narrative captures a gradual missing of Sutara’s body with a burdening, ideology-laden state of mind. Her holy trip has an asexual connotation, which picturizes her as a secluded refugee woman in her prime – an identity which, in the narrator’s words, is neither the state of widowhood nor spinsterhood, yet combines the sexual deprivation of the former and the naivety of the latter. Mookerjea-Leonard reads the withering away of Sutara’s matrimonial

prospects as a de-gendering of her body. Moreover, in the protagonist's seeing herself as a hermit, who has almost succumbed to the premature traits of old-age, there is a silent grief about her own pseudo-sexless status. Rather than her inherited Hindu high-caste identity, she, at this stage, becomes a historically moulded gender-defined caste in her own right – the caste of a refugee female. The celibacy that her body performs is primarily from the position of an exiled woman.

While Sutara keeps complaining about her friendless status, as an employed woman who lives in a girl's hostel, she is, in fact, in a better position to choose her companions than a home-bred *bhadramahila*. By friendlessness therefore, what Sutara implies is her disappointment from the perspective of a petit-bourgeois household woman – the longing to be in the company of upper-caste Hindu “*bhadra*” connections – denoting that her individual career and entity outside of family relations has failed to give her a surrogate life of fulfillment among students, colleagues and acquaintances. Instead of her dialogue with the “unspoken” and the “unspeakable,”¹⁹⁹ her journey, after quitting Noakhali, is thus directed towards the acquisition of an “appropriate” identity, without which her Self is seen to remain incomplete. Her seeking to connect only in terms of communal sameness, as is possible in *dharamshalas* (rest-houses for Hindu pilgrims), reveals her aspiration for the *bhadramahila*'s status.

In spite of having been let down by the patriarchal designs of caste and community, Sutara's decision to marry the Hindu *bhadralok* Promode responds to the expectations of “propriety” and status-quo of the larger society, rather than her personal impulses. In this, she is

¹⁹⁹ Chakraborty offers a cogent insight by drawing on Shefali Moitro's discussion on the “unspoken,” a metaphysical silence and the “unspeakable,” a communicative silence. She brings in Cathy Caruth's explanation about the trauma victim as well as Spivak's notion of inertness of the gendered subaltern, and observes the complicity between a strategically restricted linguistic system and the audience's political standpoint in perpetuating this communication gap.

like Tamij *saheb*'s younger son Moinuddin who, despite being a teacher and an intellectual, cannot rid himself of the long-established belief that marriage is an extension of familial, racial and clan relationships (102). By choosing not to marry her village neighbour Azizuddin from the Other community, presumably because men from that same community had molested her family, Sutara assumes the collective representation of Hinduism and Hindu nationhood.²⁰⁰ Ironically, after her misfortune, the latter had never thought of her as one among its own. On the other hand, it is fallacious to generalize Azizuddin with the Muslim perpetrators in the Noakhali episode. This is because Aziz belongs to the particular aggressor community, which had assailed Sutara. Yet, he is neither a benefactor nor a transmitter of those Muslim men, who considered themselves as the custodians of future "unalloyed" Islamist state. By willing to marry Sutara, Aziz is ready to open up the traditionally dictated closures of home, not only to a member from the hostile Hindu religion, but also a female body that has perhaps been socially stigmatized through rape. Given that in Hindu matrimonial schemes, a bride is ideologically made to part with her paternal house's customs and espouse that of her in-laws,' it is common for the readers to presume that the inter-communal marriage between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman could have resulted in suppression of the latter's cultural-communal specificities. This, however, does not deter the fact that rather than viewing her as a Hindu or a "tarnished" woman, Aziz looks at Sutara as his childhood love, whom he had always wanted to marry. Promode, instead, gains her

²⁰⁰ In her implicit tendency of generalizing her mistrust towards Bengali Muslim men, and remembering them only through the memory of Muslim perpetrators who destroyed her family, Sutara may be seen as echoing Larry May and Robert Strikwerda's conclusion that rape is neither an individual nor a private act (May and Strikwerda 137). According to the researchers, men at large benefit from the social existence of rape, because it sets them as women's protectors against potential rapists, thereby strengthening male bonding activity through denial of women's rights, and in fact, by perceiving women as "the highly sexualized stereotype of the female" (148). While this is an extremely cynical point of view, which, when juxtaposed with the Partition context negatively marks an entire community, this can be seen as a possible tendency among women, who physically brooked the consequences of riots.

confidence afterwards in the role of a future guardian. The fact that Sutara, at the moment of crisis, relies on Tamij *saheb*'s hospitality, instead of crossing the border with unknown Hindu volunteers,²⁰¹ goes on to show that her nature of dependence on the former is a consequence of habitual trust built over a long period of time, through village and neighbourhood connections. Such a dependence cannot be suddenly overwritten by the newly founded Hindu and Islamic nation-states. Subhoranjan Dasgupta observes: "Compared to this state [indicating Sutara's treatment as a *Hari* or *Bagdi* (the "Untouchables") in her Calcutta kin's house], her refuge in Tamijkaka's house was better because there she was at least a part of a web of human ties" (Dasgupta 13). For Tamij *saheb*'s family, Sutara is not just another raped or orphaned girl – the way Promode or his family view her – but above all a friend's daughter and therefore a beloved guest, who ought to be cared for and sheltered. Sutara loses this individuality of her identity, upon being relocated from the "enemy's" to the "kinfolk's" milieu.

As I discuss below in the section on "*bhadramahila*," Sutara decides to marry Promode with the aim of strengthening her communal security and obtaining class protection. In the process, however, she agrees to being marked as the "refugee and later resuscitated" pitiable female by Promode's Hindu family, rather than accept the filial love offered by Aziz's Muslim family. Mookerjea-Leonard observes that Sutara being at the periphery of the two rival communities unnerves the discourse of Hindu cultural nationalism ("Disenfranchised Body" par. 39), and so needs to be incorporated into the secure Hindu familial pattern. Her Hinduized integration is meant to domesticate her discursive identity within predictable webs of rightness –

²⁰¹ Volunteers such as the Gandhians, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Arya Samaji, missionaries and the Indian National Army came forward with the food, clothing, shelter and medical aid. A small advisory committee of women social workers attached to the Ministry of Rehabilitation – the Women's Section – was appointed. These organizations' main functions were establishing homes and centres, programmes of education, giving orphan children to adoption, arranging marriage of young women and financial aid and employment (Menon and Bhasin, "Partition Widows" 400-401). For the women, state became the paternalistic, welfarist, socialist, democratic and secular guardian in the absence of their actual kinsfolk (399).

the right religion, the right country and the right body. This permits a refugee female's problematic non-personhood to again garner details in becoming a Mother, a Wife and a Sister. Therefore, Sutara's rejection of the Muslim matrimonial proposal cannot be seen only as a tribute to the memory of her deceased family members. It is simultaneously also an attempt to self-rehabilitate her once estranged body from the past imprints of "another set of practices that constitute another everyday life" (Mookerjea-Leonard, "Quarantined" 25) into her "original community." The decision of marriage within Promode's family also reflects Sutara's preference for one Mother figure over the other. Between Tamij *saheb*'s kind wife, who wants to adopt Sutara as her own and condemns the fanaticism of extremist Muslim men, and Promode's mother, who accusatively monitors Sutara's body and movements, Sutara chooses the latter in terms of closer familiarity. Her choice betrays her will to be with and thereby replicate the behaviour of those females who carry out communalist-patriarchal culture.

The entrapment of a woman within her caste and clan networks, and the masculine nature of these constructs is evinced when Sutara, in spite of her doubt about her mother and sister's death, attempts to offer *pinda* (libation) to the souls of her parents and sister. The priest confronts her with questions about her marital status and *gotra* (clan) and whether she has a male sibling, in which case the right to offer libation would pass on to him. By observing this rite which is supposed to endow salvation to her deceased family, she submits to the male-centred diktats of Hinduism. Its prerequisite criteria tries to cram her holistic identity into mainstream institutions, such as *gotra* of her paternal lineage, marriage and her concomitant entrée into a husband's family, and relationship to a brother, who is supposedly the preeminent carrier of her father's blood and property. Bharati Ray states that the ritual of *shraddha* (funeral) binds the son to his ancestors, whereas the daughter's exclusion from this service marks her as a transferrable object

duly sent to her husband's home ("Women of Bengal" 5). She can ideally claim her husband's family *gotra* and its ensuing rights, only after begetting a male heir. On the other hand, Sutara's offering *pinda*, in spite of knowing that her elder brother Sanat is alive, can be seen as an initiative towards re-internalizing her father's caste Hinduness.²⁰²

Yet the narrative also fulfils a predictable causality throughout. The fact that Sutara's journey to Rishikesh is eventually followed by Promode's proposal of marriage to her remarkably makes the spiritual episode a conscious pre-arrangement of purgation, in order to justify her suitability as a bride in a *bhadralok*'s household. By virtue of not indulging in arbitrary sexual pleasures and additionally undergoing spiritual "atonement," Sutara turns out to be the perfectly deserving candidate for Promode's charity. Notwithstanding her abrasive criticism of the inhuman process of sexual purification and the systemic oppression of women's engendered Selves, Jyotirmoyee Devi, nevertheless, preserves economy in the display of violence on Sutara's body. This is done with the aim of keeping aside a prearranged sanitized future for the protagonist, who may, after all, be slipped into the space of bourgeois Hindu domesticity.²⁰³

This same logic of causality can also be applied in understanding why, despite *pinda*-offering, Sutara never revisits her paternal homestead, in the capacity of her dead father's

²⁰² According to Veena Das, in Hindu sacred rituals around the dead body, a woman is expected to witness the grief and loss that death inflicts, whereas men are allotted the task of physically performing the cremation (Das, "Language and Body" 81). In Sutara's act of offering *pinda* to her parents and sisters, she, for once, transcends the traditionally pigeon-holed gendered roles. Being present at the spot when the tragedy befell her mother and sister, she performs the "feminine role" of mourning as well as the "masculine role" of observing sacramental duties for her family's salvation. It is, thus, an irony that the radical image that she assumes by enacting a daughter's as well as a son's role cannot prevent her ultimate submergence within the clichéd *bhadramahila* ideology.

²⁰³ Like my above reasoning, Mookerjee-Leonard also thinks it is possible that Jyotirmoyee Devi chooses to maintain elite domesticity's "sanctity," where Sutara is predestined to reenter in the future ("Disenfranchised Body" par. 41). Yet, over and above this speculation, as well as the possibility that Jyotirmoyee Devi is anxious about her readership and hence "withholds details," Mookerjee-Leonard stresses on the fact that the author is an "indisputably radical critique of patriarchy," and also fairly established at the time of the novel's publication.

successor. Such a gesture quite calculatedly paves the way for transference of her family-clan through marriage. It suggests Sutara's probable entree into another *bhadralok* family as a daughter-in-law, which would relieve her of the incessant search for lost prestige that was, in the first place, associated with her respectable middle-class birth. Her not retracing to the paternal home symbolically hints her finding a "new home," which would also be her original and permanent point of reference. Once anchored to this newly acquired identity, the dead parents' dilapidated house and class status become socio-economically irrelevant, and henceforth find no mention in the story.

Sutara, Marriage of Convenience and Pity

The *bhadralok* class' dealing with the raped women, as understood by Nayanika Mookherjee in the context of Bangladesh Liberation War (1971), reminds us of Sutara Dutta's predicament amid her Calcutta kin:

...It is this double helix of posturings of modernity of the progressive middle class's resistive politics along with hypocritical value judgments and moral positions that places the raped woman in a place of taboo and transgression. Hence, her necessary appropriation is made possible only within their romantic, literary and domestic paradigms (38).

From Judith Butler's statement, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender Trouble* 140), one realizes that the performativity of the collective violence of rape marks the victim's body as merely a female anatomy and a political sign, on which is inscribed rigid programmes affecting nation, community and family.

By describing one of Sutara's post-Partition experiences at a relative's wedding in Calcutta, the narrator shows how the allegedly raped and thereby "impure" refugee woman becomes an antithesis to the domain of marriage. While in this occasion the hosts serve food to

Sutara at a conspicuous physical distance from other guests, even at a previous occasion, she is removed from her sister-in-law's house and put in a boarding school. The chief motivation behind this gesture is the taboo and fear that her "negative" reputation might dispel nuptial proposals for other unmarried girls in the family. Coercive separation of Sutara's body from the institution of marriage can also be connected to its being rejected from the legitimate circle of reproduction, which otherwise enables a *bhadramahila* to become the biological container of the future *bhadralok*. This alienation becomes the synecdoche of her ostracized womb and vagina viz-a-viz the ritually sanctified performance of Hindu wedding, because they have been presumably "polluted" by the "unfamiliar" men. This is more so because a bourgeois system of marriage underwrites the social licence for two individuals from identical class, caste and communal backgrounds to be involved in a permanent and pledged conjugal relationship, in order to replicate and strengthen the "ideal" notion of citizenry. Such a marriage is therefore extremely wary of and willing to suppress all such marginalized presences that might destabilize its unchallenged social equations. Further, the Hindu marriage rites and the associated Vedic chants strongly evoke codes of fertility and reproduction, curiously most of which revolve around the bride and signify male-controlled anxiety to appease the gods, lest she turns out to be barren.²⁰⁴ In this entire procedure, the very question of masculine sterility or "impurity" does not

²⁰⁴ This concern is expressed right from the puberty rites of the Hindu girls, where after the menarche shower, she is made to pose her palms in the *yoni mudra* (sign of the vulva) and a ripe banana, representing penis, is put into it. Moreover, it is a common practice among unmarried Indian women to worship Lord Shiva, who, as a sign of masculine potency, wears snakes around him; women touch their head to the *shiva linga* (genital of Shiva) in order to be blessed with fertility. Regarding the sexual symbols in Hindu marriage, Sara Kärkkäinen Terian observes: "In India bamboo is considered such a symbol, so the wedding canopy is supported by bamboo poles, and a mango twist is tied together with the bamboo pole because mango, too, is associated with marriage and fertility" (Terian, "Marriage Rituals" 234). Apart from that, the presence of banana stock, betel leaves and curd suggest the desirability of imminent procreation as a result of the "sacred" union. In the Bengali wedding ceremony, putting parched rice into the fire means appeasing *Agni* (Fire God) to beget healthy progeny. It is important to note that even as Goddess *Kali* is the epitome of femininity, who aggressively stands naked on a prostrate *Shiva*, thereby making erotic suggestions, the bourgeois Hindu society is a reflection of the Vishnu marriage, where a couple's

arise; especially the latter problem is dealt with by the clichéd argument that Hindu men are allowed to practice polygamy according to the scriptures.²⁰⁵ Consequently, an unequal power of the vagina and the womb in comparison with the penis is educed and reinvigorated by the “authentic” religious tenets and applied to the society, resulting in the marking of women as “good” or “bad” in patriarchal terms. Sutara’s experience of being shunned at the wedding is therefore an exclusively feminine refugee experience. At the same time, in her body being sequestered to a hostel away from family or isolated from typical family gatherings, the class-caste praxis of the *bhadralok* puts her in the same row as the non-Hindus and Dalits.²⁰⁶

Uditi Sen’s study of the stock molds created around Bengali refugee women’s images is useful in qualifying the case of Sutara Dutta. As Sen observes, the four main categorizations of the Bengali refugee women were as bodies vulnerable to rape and dishonour, as economically and socially marginal members who were not rehabilitable, as unequal participants in the refugee movement whose contributions were seen as “inspirational” than substantive, and as bread-winners who transgressed the proper role of women as home-makers. In either lamenting the fate of the “doomed” spinster refugee women or highlighting the “ignominy” to which the refugee

relationship is supposed to carry the same hierarchical undertones as the divine partners *Vishnu* and *Lakshmi* – *Vishnu* being the dominating husband, and *Lakshmi* his submissive and ‘ideal’ consort.

²⁰⁵ In fact, in the traditional Hinduist paradigm, rape and abduction of females were socially consented and reckoned as part of marriage, which renders the Hindu heteronormative system as atrocious. For example, *Rakshaha Vivah* would happen through forceful annexation of the enemy clan’s females by the victor warriors, who would take them as war prizes. On the other hand, *Paisacha Vivah* meant unfairly kidnapping an insentient woman and molesting her. Hindu authorities would absolve their involvement in these acts of “marriage,” by tagging them as “non-Aryan” and “Sudra” tendencies, which, however, ought to be legitimized for the sake of the children born out of them (“Eight Forms of Hindu Marriage and Its Custom” n.p.).

²⁰⁶ Having said that, even if a Dalit male is traditionally treated in the same way, his physical distantiating from the Brahminical practices is interpretable in terms of labour divisions, not his reproductive capacity. Moreover, in terms of gender, a Dalit male is closer to the hegemonic patriarchal rulebooks of Hinduism and can be incorporated within its canons following his socio-economic escalation. I have discussed how caste and gender interact to heighten or undermine power, in the earlier part of this chapter.

women who “sunk” to prostitution would subject their entire colony and community, what came into the forefront was the anxiety of the *bhadralok* refugees regarding their own social status, ideals and traditions. Sen questions Gargi Chakravartty’s much acclaimed assumption that women’s involvement in Marxist circles was a sure marker of their educational progressivism (Chakravartty, *Coming Out of Partition*), and cautions against any unqualified acceptance of the working refugee woman’s “emancipated” icon. Rather, she looks into the terms under which such participation was allowed.²⁰⁷ She notes that instead of mimetic sources of their social realities or actual inclusion of women’s voices in various Partition narratives, what was represented was a report based on cultural constructs. The East Bengali Hindu refugee woman’s body, thus, became a site of sanctity and honour of the East Bengali *bhadralok* community. While Calcutta became a location of contestation and conflicts among the refugees for establishment of their rights, the infiltrating refugee men found the trope of “women under threat” to be useful in underscoring their self-image as victims and mentally tortured persons.

As Promode and his friends discuss the plight of refugee women in post-Partition India, and putatively connect their own marital prospects with these women, they perceive the refugee women as test subjects for their own “revolutionary” and “missionary” experiments. Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar states how, in the face of communal atrocity, the powerlessness of the male protectors had become proportional to the susceptibility of the women, as the former had, in most cases, eye-witnessed without being able to prevent rapes, abductions and murder

²⁰⁷ P.K. Dutta explains how the “normal” girl’s extraordinary abilities formed the domain of *satitva*, which, while keeping to the eulogizing tone, did not permit any feminist supremacy to flourish beyond reconciliation with patriarchy: “Women’s agency is given an erotic charge even as it is sublimated. It can be argued that the reference to *satitva* gives to Suhasini a transcendental and iconic significance. But the point of this discourse is missed if we see it as merely striving to create goddess-images. On the contrary, it seeks to make the exceptional activity of “normal” women an exemplary phenomenon that would persuade other “normal” women to realize their own potentialities. But if this is the point where the discourse of Hindu communalism breaches tradition, at the same time its celebration of women’s agency is done in terms that follow the contours of the male gaze. The latter gives a regulative orientation to the break” (71).

(Rajakumar 64).²⁰⁸ Real-life reminiscence and confession by Satyendraprasad Biswas in “Mukto Seemanter Shesh Raat” (“The Last Night at the Open Border”) also substantiates Rajkumar’s reflection that the memory of bodily violence on women for these male riot-survivors is fraught with a combined impression of gender, experience and trauma. Rajkumar sees the mob itself as an epitome of masculine helplessness and rage at not being able to prevent the desecration of their womenfolk by enemy groups, such that retaliating by dishonouring the enemy’s “mothers” and “sisters” could be the only way of mending the injury caused to their collective male ego. She explains how, at the time of Partition, the status of “mothers, sisters” came to represent the entirety of the female population of a community. With an apparent return of social sanity in the post-Partition decades, the *bhadralok* like Promode and his socially conscious friends take on from the previous episodes of masculine failure, with the aim of salving their restive memory by offering service to all those female riot victims, whom they could not protect earlier.²⁰⁹ It is, however, important to recognize that such purportedly noble mission is not only a way of venting

²⁰⁸ Rather than centralizing only the woman as the game of the Partition atrocities, Khadija Mastoor’s short story “They are Taking Me Away, Father, They are Taking Me Away” sees the Partition violence in terms of a total collapse of the protectionist ideals that men at the same time secured and transgressed. During the Partition riots, man’s position as a protector and a violator were hardly differentiable, as he primarily assumed the gender roles available within familial rhetoric, seeing female citizen subjects either as part of his Self or as Other. In the story, the volunteer’s character is a victim of traumatized memory just like the sexually vulnerable girl, who the mob takes as a spoil of virile victory. Despite referring to the woman as a “lamb” and asking the mob to “Have pity, don’t touch her,” the volunteer’s agony lies in not being able to carry out the chivalrous ideology that he represents. As the mob questions him: “where was humanity then, and where were you?” the volunteer’s resistive, vocal figure transforms into that of a passive colluder, who had failed to act similarly in a previous violence. Seen in this way, the men do not remain only the actors of the Partition carnage as a generalized picture would have it, but are also acted upon as abject pawns (*Cool, Sweet Water: Selected Stories*).

²⁰⁹ Though in a reverse way, Promode’s position can be compared to the middle-class men in Bangladesh during the Liberation War (1971), who were the chief actors of applying bourgeois aestheticizing sensibilities and merging the image of the “Mother Nation” with that of the raped woman. This was a romanticizing project that aimed to redeem the raped women to essentialized, normative spheres, and exalted them as “*birangonas*” or the war-heroines. However, the unease on the part of the family members of these “*birangonas*” around the issue of transgression of “female virtue” shows the lapse in such mission for women’s empowerment. For more, see Mookherjee’s “Gendered Embodiments: Mapping the Body-Politic of the Raped Woman and the Nation in Bangladesh.”

the hitherto castrated male hero persona, thereby echoing the pan-Indian task of rehabilitating the abducted women; it is also predicated on the image of the perpetually violated feminine object of Partition. Such a self-serving humane act therefore either does not take into account the constant changing aspects involved in the social, political, economic and familial circles of the female victims since Partition, or wants to superimpose the victims' current realities of emancipation, resurgence and independence with a timeless image of tragedy.

Promode's comparing the condition of the refugee working women with "living hell into which people are forced to descend to take to a profession, to keep body and soul together" (118) or else succumb to death like *Sita*, refers to the national patriarchal rhetoric in a newly independent India. This same allegory is used by his father Amulya *babu* in an earlier part of the novel, as he compares Sutara's departure to the missionary school hostel with *Sita*'s exile. It is hinted that Amulya *babu* at that point wishes to adopt her back within the family in some distant future as his daughter-in-law. However, the quality in Sutara that moves him to consider such an idea is not her virtue or beauty, as would have traditionally influenced a father-in-law, but her mournful appearance:

She became the exiled *Sita*, *Amba* or any other neglected girl – a symbol for all of them. He was close to tears when he thought of the numerous of girls like her left to fend for themselves (50).

Rachel Weber's research concludes that many second generation refugee women in West Bengal went back to the life of homemaking after they were relatively more ensconced, and the elite first generation saw it as a blemish on their refined background to have to work in exchange of paid salary (mentioned elsewhere in Introduction). As far as the political scenario was concerned, women's active participation in the Tebhaga movement (1946), which was one of the first

peasant insurgency successfully carried out by the communists aiming for agrarian revolution, was publicly regretted by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Ray. He stated:

women...have become heartless and cruel. They defy the law, and throw acid bombs. This is the most distressing activity of the Communist programme in Bengal (Bandyopadhyay, "The Communists" 120).

What Promode considers as "hell," Amulya babu as "exile" and Dr. Ray as uncalled aggression are, thus, all rooted in the assumption that women are embodiments of the socialized and subjugated attributes of *bhadramahila*. In their opinions, womanhood is principally bifurcated into two categories – those that can retain the expectations of the *bhadralok*-conceived idea of middle-class-ness, and those that willingly or unwillingly breach this boundary. While an intentional disobeying of the *bhadramahila* symbol would make fearsome anti-types out of a woman, her reluctant insertion within the outside "macho" world would define her as resigned and long-suffering. Unlike the pejorative qualities with which the former is judged, the latter, by virtue of her loyalty to the patriarchal injunctions, is still considered worthy of re-acceptance within the mainstream, with due effort on the part of the "liberal" *bhadralok*.

Regarding Promode's marriage, his mother makes clear distinction between "*bhadra*" and "*abhadra*" women, by comparing the famous Datta family's "beautiful" and "educated" girl, who is also a state figure's daughter and would bring riches and rank to her in-laws, with Sutara, an immigrant orphan from East Bengal. Being a *ginni* (senior household lady) from a wealthy and reputed household, she judges a prospective bride by her paternal family's fame as well as the tie-ups between the two patriarchal clans, rather than her individual achievements. In other words, a bride is the medium for balancing out the familial deals, in Promode's mother's words, the instrument through which "country, family, relations, friends" (123) are brought to purview through the settlement of marriage. One may notice that the aforementioned distinguished

Hatkhola family's daughter has been educated up to graduation, but instead of being introduced to the world of salaried occupation, is precipitately given to marriage. In Bharati Ray's study, this practice roots back to the socio-religious reform movements in the 19 C, when women, apart from merely being taught *bratas* or religious rites that would fetch them a comfortable life at their in-laws,' were also given some primary education which included English learning, so that they could meet the criteria of an educated and modern wife and mother ("Women of Bengal" 6, 8). Their accomplishments were modelled after the prudish Victorian standards, and were meant to lend socio-cultural support to the Westernized native men-folk, rather than enhance their own economic and cultural goals.²¹⁰ By wanting to marry Promode to such an apparently "modern" woman, his orthodox family wishes to hold on to the "correct" feminine mannerisms as described by the Hindu scriptures, which asks to keep women under permanent tutelage of men. This family, thus, underpins the rigid dichotomization between public and private spheres, which is the basis of patriarchal authority of a Hindu home (5). Moreover, because the "Hatkhola's girl" has been introduced to Promode's family as an acquaintance of his relatives, such a connubial match allays the typical bourgeoisie anxiety around the notion of the "unknown."

Therefore, by agreeing to assimilate herself to the regressive standards of Promode's family, and

²¹⁰ Liddle and Joshi agree that while education for a professional woman greatly alleviates a woman's traditional seclusion, dependence on men and bondage to domesticity, thereby outweighing her gender subordination with class privileges, it can also disadvantage her gender position by solely acting as a determinant for marriage. The authors observe that women's education is seen as a commodity viz-a-viz the marital prospects, and a medium for mutual benefit for the bride's father and the groom – through it, the father acquires "the social honour of a higher-class son-in-law for less dowry," and the husband gains "the prestige of an educated wife" ("Winning and Losing" 158-159). In this process of moderation of women's education, male supremacy is re-established "through controlling the kind, quantity and purpose of the education...insisting that she continues to perform the domestic, personal, sexual and reproductive functions within the family as well as her economic function in the workplace" (160). On the other hand, from the fact that the women who first entered the professional arena and acquired education belonged to the middle-class upper-caste origins, one can surmise that gendered freedom in their cases was by and large paradoxical. These professional women continued to be primarily depicted as domestic, and were represented in terms of the hierarchical caste structure (159). As women's education has thus been always exploited to enhance men's material and social status, it indirectly helps to entrench the "upper" and "lower" class stratifications in a patriarchal arrangement.

substitute the role of the aforementioned non-entity bride, Sutara toes the patriarchal line of belief that a single woman, despite her vocation and independence, can hardly be self-sufficient or contented. In that way, she makes space for Promode to emerge as a larger-than-life benevolent hero, whom his mother compares to the sympathetic figures of “Buddha or Chaitanya, out to rescue the fallen” (126). Even Promode himself says: “The *suitable* grooms in our country are not *stupid* as to overlook such a *handicap* and come forward to marry an orphan” (82, emphasis mine). Here the readers can hardly neglect the excessive self-satisfaction and conscious altruism in Promode’s tone and purpose. For him, the decision to marry Sutara is not an outcome of natural affection reared between two people sharing a premise of equality; it is an act fuelled by the “noble” intention of restoring all those social facilities that Sutara as an orphan refugee woman had lost after the incident of riot. Despite its outward nobility, this marriage, just like any normative bourgeois conjugal union, reinscribes and sets in motion what Sunder Rajan calls a “sexual contract,” which is both patriarchal in establishing men’s political rights on women, and sexual in allowing men’s access to women’s bodies (“Women, Citizenship” 9).

Bharati Ray’s insight into the early 20 C joint families and the socio-political forces that made rational actors out of women, may be taken into consideration while studying the case of Sutara’s relationship with Promode’s family. As Ray explains, the joint family system conferred upon the *karta* or male head the greatest share of power over other members, in terms of primogeniture and gender superiority. Having access to the outside world as the primary breadwinner and flag-bearer of the patrilineal title, *karta* configured the codes of discipline within the power-driven institution of family. Unlike this father-figure, who would be fostered since childhood under privileged notions of unique masculine identification, his wife and corresponding domestic front’s lead, the *ginni*, who Ray reads as the authoritarian mother-in-law

of *zenana* would, however, display a more multifaceted moral fibre. From being a docile, obedient and passive bride to an epitome of control in the present, she would symbolize a gradual rise in the women-centric and women-produced structures of contests, whose basic grounds, especially in the absence of blood ties as in case of the men, were set around envy and fetish for occupation of recognized feminine domains. Additionally, her power, unlike that of the *karta*, would signify a perversion of lately attained authority, as she had to trail the transition from victim to aggressor (“Bengali Women and Politics of Joint Family” 3016-17). Promode’s mother’s proclaimed bitterness upon seeing Sutara the “outsider” in the precincts of her kitchen marks her own insecurity and fear of the “new,” whose incursion might nullify her prolonged struggle and perseverance, and challenge her authority within the limited space socially sanctioned to her. With regard to her power in terms of being the *karta*’s wife, her motherhood also plays a crucial role. As Ray points out, motherhood becomes the node of contact establishing a woman’s blood-link to her husband’s patriliney (3017). It is only by this “motherly role” that a woman is able to at least temporarily tame the brash macho figure into a submissive son, through promise of tender emotional dependence. However, this mother-son framework aptly applies to the figure of the aggressive hypermasculine character, who ought to be “tamed.” It is not very relevant in the case of Promode, a post-Partition modern educated man symbolizing “new patriarchy.” Additionally, Promode’s father, a judicious patriarch with a rational outlook, helps to moderate the traditionalist norms in their joint family.

Ray notes that urban middle-class Bengali women, especially the post-Second World War female generation, placed high value on education and career-oriented learning (“Women of Bengal” 7, 9-10). As working women began to contribute their income to the in-laws’ household, they could no longer be physically or ideologically controlled within the orthodox structure and

the ensuing misrepresentations of patriarchal family. Even though the cultural ideal of the subsequently fissioned nuclear families more-or-less remained rooted to joint family order of discipline, the concept of time and temporality vastly changed for the working new-age women, in many cases peculiarly also earning them a “positive relaxation” from their in-laws’ controlling voices (“Bengali Women” 3018). Overall, Ray’s research reveals the end of servile expectations from the employed daughter-in-law, and the modern circumstance’s rejection of the older feminine authority structure. On the other hand, in *The River Churning*, the narrator makes it clear that Sutara’s only way of reclaiming visibility and attaining a “respectable” identity among kinsfolks is by becoming a *bhadralok* Promode’s wife. Her academic facility serves the commonplace anachronistic objective with which English was initiated among urban middle-class women – to glorify the status of the gentleman husband’s family, without seeking any public recognition or remuneration for its own sake.

A Victimized Refugee Woman or an Aspiring *Bhadramahila*?

The class and caste-based divisions in Sutara’s native village is implied in the beginning of the novel. Later, at the time of Partition, these discrepancies also pick up along communal lines. While Sutara remembers the debacle only in terms of communal rivalry, the pre-riot so-called peaceable picture of her village intimates perpetual conditions of socio-economic exploitation. Jyotirmoyee Devi describes the village population as mainly comprising Muslim farmers, labourers, weavers, and a large section of Hindu *Namasudras*, who earned their living as fishermen, boatmen or domestics, compared to whom the caste Hindu or wealthy Muslim families were thin in number. She writes how inequality was naturalized and instituted as a divine ordain in the village, which not even the villagers could question:

For Muslims, what mattered was the decree of Allah, Khuda’s wish; for Hindus, it was the will of God, which made for social differences. Some were rich, others

were *destined to be poor* – *they believed in this law of the world* (6, emphasis mine).

This statement gives way to conditions of hierarchy, and inherent in its fatalistic submission to feudalism can be found the inkling of class-caste revolt. From the status-quo hinted in the above statement, the nature of the riot and the outrage done to the Dutta family takes on a new dimension. For example, while the *bhadralok* Duttas were accosted and molested by their “non-*bhadra*” Muslim workers, Sutara was saved by an upper-class Muslim neighbour, which offers a second standpoint of class harmony among elite Hindus and Muslims, outside the vista of religion. Moreover, besides class, the fact that caste practices had worsened rural relations is understood from the fact that the incendiary first broke out at *Bamunpara* (the Brahmin locality) (“Adiparva: The Beginning” 7), implying a dislike among the subalterns towards the *bhadralok* Hindus. On the other hand, as Sutara afterwards shapes her notion of “Muslim men” from the memory of local Muslim labourers attacking and assaulting her family, and not that of her Muslim neighbour Tamij *saheb* who rescued her, she carries a prejudiced and selective picture of the carnage, replicating the nationalistic Hinduized theory.

In Paulomi Chakraborty’s understanding, the “marginalized” Sutara’s voicelessness can be rooted back to her personal incapacity as well as her environment’s fiasco in supplying her with apt articulation. My research, however, questions as to which Sutara Chakraborty considers to be marginalized, why and with respect to whom. The Sutara that the readers meet in the opening of the novel is an Assistant Professor of History in a women’s college, and a signifier of economic and social independence, who is in charge of her own future. There is no denying that gender mediates the different ways in which men and women are constructed. Yet, for once, if we turn a blind eye to her gender, which has persistently allowed objectification of her Self, and instead see her in terms of her educational achievements, she replicates the story of many

middle-class upper-caste male immigrants, who, through their academic capacity, had commanded a vast change in material conditions within the phase of a single generation. Because she is depicted as a history teacher in the current narrative temporality, she can take up a function not known to many refugee women – that of critically interpreting the past, in order to broach the hitherto ignored multiple streams of historical consciousness. She can implement the language of the privileged, albeit in terms of certain pre-fixed, non-negotiable and stricture-bound curricula. Seen this way, it is difficult to identify her as “marginalized.”²¹¹ What Chakraborty calls as “not having the linguistic space in history to talk about gender crimes” (171), despite a woman’s awareness about the “deep hegemony and shame” (172), points towards an overarching feminist sentimentalism, which pins down Sutara as “The” rape victim. In my analysis, notwithstanding the struggle and ordeal that she undergoes, Sutara’s lookout for family and familiarity and willingness to gaze at herself through the “eye” of the *bhadralok* value system displays a marked petit-bourgeois craving for a protected domain, from which she had been dispossessed after the killing of her *bhadralok* father.

As I have suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Sutara’s silence can also be read as a consent to the projection of her femininity in terms of traditionalist ideals. Through her reticence, she fits herself into new patriarchy’s stereotype about refugee women as a helpless populace that is averse to taking up a job. As Promode is about to go abroad in pursuance of better opportunities in career and income, whereas Sutara takes on the role of an eternally waiting dutiful fiancée whose life henceforth would be defined more by the marriage than by her profession, their relationship is ultimately imprinted by respectable bourgeois coupledom. Her

²¹¹ Even while talking about “an afterword” to the recorded history as well as the “history of the vanquished,” her Hindu nationalistic alignment often comes to view – she enumerates the figures of “Lal Bal Pal,” Aurobindo and Khudiram, who were all quintessences of the Swarajist movement, but not a single Muslim revolutionary leader finds mention in this list (*The River Churning* 2).

scholarly life is made ancillary to her future wifehood to a gentleman, who has an impending high career to follow. All her previous achievements are at the mercy of the unprecedented opening for her to become a *bhadramahila*, even though such an opportunity would tailor her freedom according to the socio-political circumstances of new patriarchy, without overtly tagging her as an outmoded *prachina*.²¹²

Besides other decisive factors, such as the impact of World Wars, Calcutta's evacuation after the bombing of Rangoon (1941-42), the inflation (1939-47) that caused a 250% rise in essential commodities, and the Bengal famine (1943-44), the country-wide independence struggle, especially the Leftist movements in Bengal, had brought about huge inversions in the socio-economic and cultural placement of women (Ray 7). Hailing originally from a village in Noakhali but becoming a self-reliant college teacher, Sutara willingly or unwillingly belongs to that set of female populace, who had challenged the traditional norms of feminine conduct. Hence, Sutara's quitting her former liberated position vitiates the credibility of her "triumph" that the critics celebrate in this novel. By agreeing to re-enter the ghetto of "family" that had boycotted her in the past, only because such a "family" bears communal and class semblance

²¹² "Prachina," according to Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, is portrayed as the repository of authentic Indian values. In the Orientalist-nationalist re-interpretation of history, "prachina" is "emblematic of all that has remained unsullied by external touch, by the colonial encounter" (Bandyopadhyay 34). However, rather than a "prachina," Sutara is best understood in the light of Sushila's model character in *Sushilar Upakhyan*. Sushila and Sutara epitomize Gourmohan Vidyalkar's supposedly progressive view for women: "...if modern female education empowers women, then it does so by giving them the strength to follow the traditional patriarchal tenets with greater tenacity and steadfastness" (Bandyopadhyay 27). Their characters are the corresponding female prototypes of new patriarchy – the New Age woman or "nabina," who was expected to imbibe both Western "civilization" and indigenous "*sadachar*" (proper morals). Like Sushila, Sutara's life-journey is also cast in the mould of her spiritual capital, and there is no room for leisure in her pre-set ideas of womanhood and mundane duties. Moreover, similar to Sushila's perfect counterpart Chandrakumar, the humble clerk, whose upward mobility and rise in status is foreseeable to the readers, so for the idealized character of Promode, who tends to complement Sutara's hardship with his apparent egalitarianism. These female characters are looked up in the popular consciousness as *bhadramahilas* who are paragon of virtues, and meant to edify and "discipline" the non-*bhadramahilas* in terms of household ethics. Though created in a postcolonial milieu and despite her being portrayed as a modern educated individual, Sutara's character's linguistic lack and absence of agency does not seem to have evolved much from Sushila's Sanskrit hyperboles.

with her paternal descent, she thwarts her possibility of becoming an unconventional refugee woman. She cannot be perceived as the victim, who, as Caruth argues, is able to resituate her/his understanding of history through the notion of trauma (11). The author's initial criticism about engulfment of women's voices by masculinist historiography, and Sutara's own questions – whose authorship of history, whose subjectivity in history and how the category of "historical" is formed – remain unresolved, as Sutara modifies her riot-wounded "non-*bhadramahila*"-ness according to the demands of *bhadralok*-dom. Despite having lived an educated and intellectual life, she struggles throughout the narrative in the clutches of an "abused and rehabilitated" woman's image. P.K. Dutta notes: "...woman does not disappear. On the contrary, her fate is dramatized in order to underline the utter repudiation of her choices and personhood" (70).

It is paradoxical that as soon as Sutara gets a chance to be potentially "elevated" into *bhadramahila*-hood, she begins to dissociate her own identity from the heterogeneous "outside" cosmos, such as Tamij *saheb*'s household, the girl's hostels and the Hastinapur Yajnaseni College. She tries to abandon the memories associated with these milieus. This is despite the fact that in lieu of the inimical "*bhadra*" domains, these places had, for a significant phase of time, been her vicarious "homes." Especially at the end of the novel, where she seems to accept Promodes's proposal, her repeated emphasis on "security" and "kindness" extended by Promode (133) depicts her thus far independent life as a teacher in a negative light.²¹³ By refusing to acknowledge her previous circles, Sutara caters to the demands of the much-coveted site of *bhadra* domesticity, where she aspires to settle. Her aspiration is betrayed in her secret

²¹³ This comes from the author-narrator's own view, who synonymizes professional women with those who were "molested, without shelter, money or power....victims of Partition" (69).

cherishing of the humdrum domestic happiness of her married friend Sakina.²¹⁴ She craves for the structure of elitism, which considers *antahpur* or inner women's quarters to be the ideal location for Hindu females. Choosing the closure of class privilege over economic and social freedom that had come to post-Partition women almost as a windfall, Sutara reveals her yearnings in light of antiquated gender configurations.²¹⁵ More than a historically damaged party, or a woman saluting her successful journey of recovery, she is therefore someone who negotiates her licence as a woman for *bhadramahila*-centric benefits.

As Mookerjea-Leonard observes, Sutara's working in college and residing in a dormitory, away from her relatives, represents a utopic idea of collective a-religious womanhood ("Disenfranchised Bodies" par. 44). Her boarding school brings together non-Hindu Dalit converts and riot victims under a singular Christian missionary refuge. In this regard, critics like Weber and Basu Guha-Choudhury note that the change of space for East Bengali refugee women, especially the population who were displaced from sprawling mansions to one-roomed accommodations, had resulted in the loss of *andarmahal*, while also creating exposures to new social, economic and political territories (elsewhere discussed in Introduction). In the same way, Sutara's translocation from an "idealized" Hindu Bengali household to the seamless space of the

²¹⁴ The narrator justifies a sense of incomplete-ness in Sutara's self-hired room in Delhi, which is short of becoming "home." She even questions: "Do women ever become independent?" (69) In an earlier part, where Sutara is given an invitation card for her relative's wedding with only her name on it (58), the narrator interprets the event only in light of tragedies pertaining to Sutara's orphanhood and "guardian-less-ness," rather than in terms of feminist optimism pertaining to her independence.

²¹⁵ Deniz Kandiyoti notes that women's strategies towards patriarchal bargains may vary with one's class, caste and ethnicity, such that the agricultural and the elite communities will never accord on a single idea of feminine autonomy. For example, in the sub-Saharan Africa, men bear lesser responsibility for women but women in turn enjoy greater independence; contrarily, Iranian women belonging to the classic patriarchal structure have been supporting Khomeini's apparently repressive measures of keeping women at home, as such measures promised to maintain their original patriarchal bargains within the inner spheres. Kandiyoti notes that during crisis, female patriarchal gain can use pressure to make a male patriarch live up to the traditional obligations, by not willing to "step out of line and lose respectability" (282-3). Even when these upper-class women have to take up jobs, they "use every symbolic means at their disposal to signify that they continue to be worthy of protection" (283).

dormitory could have facilitated, in Mookerjea-Leonard's words, the opportunity of group therapeutic function (par. 44). Later on, her shift to Delhi and association with West Punjabi refugee women and female students from all over India in her history classes, many of whom have an avid interest in the Partition issue, imply groups tied by the solidarity of sisterhood. However, the author-narrator does not treat Sutara's changed situation as a ripe chance for her to grow into a nonconformist woman. Jyotirmoyee Devi and the critics constantly emphasize Sutara's existence in Calcutta and Delhi only in the capacity of a social exile. In so doing, they invalidate the far-reaching possibilities of her guardian-less spinster status. As a refugee woman-turned-into-a-scholar, Sutara could have challenged Promode's joint family standards, or even pushed the boundaries enough to marry Aziz. Yet, these realizations miscarry in her case, as the ending of the novel intimates her third level of dislocation to England with Promode, which would mean a further removal from Noakhali, the epicentre of her assault. The fact that Sutara's initial journey never makes a full circle by going back to her *bhite* (ancestral land), implies a state of ceaseless escape from and hypocritical denial of the truth, in spite of lamenting the vacuum that this denial causes. Her escapism attends to the male-centric connotation of the Greek word "nostalgia" (Krishnendu Ray 2722), which eliminates women from the collective pain of separation from the ancestral hearth, as their belonging is instead fixed within marriage: "home is where the marriage is" (ibid.).²¹⁶ Sutara, who had earlier been a prey of the nation-dividing game, and who could rebound to a state of solidity only because of her personal camaraderie with the Muslim neighbour, over the post-Partition years turns into an inheritor of hostile communal theory by adopting categorical ideas about the Islamic state of East Pakistan. The village girl Sutara, who would not pay heed to the concept of *purdah* or about distantiating

²¹⁶ The gender-specified prescript of the Greek word "nostalgia" archetypally hints a *male's* homeward journey and his associated *masculine* anxiety and typified sentiment, as originating from being away from home (Ray 2722).

herself from people belonging to the Other community, later turns out to be an epitome of *bhadramahila*. Her compliance in the denouement reinstates loyalty to rigid middle-class mores, and justifies her enthusiastic remoulding of Self at the slightest offer of acceptance among the privileged bourgeoisie. Seen this way, Sutara, with the unsettled ironies in her character, is a direct by-product of *bhadralok* ideology, rather than the much alleged symbol of a helpless refugee woman.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyse the circumstances of Sutara Dutta, the female protagonist in Jyotirmoyee Devi's *The River Churning*, who, like the narrator Doyamoyee in Sikdar's text (Chapter 2), is born in rural East Bengal, but eventually relocates to Calcutta following the Noakhali riots. In both the texts, silence prevents the center-staging and vivid description of the Partition episodes that occur at the nationalistic level. However, contrary to *The River Churning*, which employs silence in portraying Sutara as a vulnerable, submissive refugee female, *Doyamoyeer Katha* uses silence to present the narrator Doya's character through constant defeating of the rules of stereotypes. The alternative refugee woman Doya neither capitalizes her "gendered handicap" nor relinquishes her gendered freedom to buy a stronger foothold and "security" within the patriarchal structure. In contrast, Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel furnishes a particular brand of feminism, which, while talking about refugee woman's empowerment, does not lose sight of the objective of being placed within the standard literary corpus constituting "Refugee Memory." Unlike the way many scholars read her, I see difficulties in Jyotirmoyee Devi's "feminism" and "radicalism." As her feminist standpoint strengthens and exemplifies an elite, "egalitarian" and powerful facet of new patriarchy, her novel, like Sutara Dutta's character, sustains itself in a well-thought-out balance between bargains, gains and compromises.

CHAPTER 4: Political Kitsch and Apolitical Humanism in Post-Partition Cinema

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that Ritwik Ghatak's films urgently try to build a collective *bhadralok* affect around the image of the "ideal" middle-class refugee woman. I substantiate my contention by examining Ghatak's films *The Cloud-Capped Star* (*Meghe Dhaka Tara* 1960, Bengali) and *The Golden Thread* (*Subarnarekha* 1965, Bengali), in parallel reading with Satyajit Ray's film *The Big City* (*Mahanagar* 1963, Bengali). Ritwik Ghatak (1925-1976) is an immigrant Bengali filmmaker and script-writer from Dhaka, best known for his cinematic oeuvres on Bengal Partition. He received Padma Shri for Arts (1970) and Raj Kamal Award for best story for his film *Jukti, Tokko aar Goppo* (1974). Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) is a Bengali filmmaker and fiction-writer from Calcutta, who is primarily associated with his films on the Apu trilogy. He is also a winner of the Honorary Academic Award (1992), Bharat Ratna (1992) and the Lifetime Honorary Oscar (1992). I study the two female protagonists – Arati from *Mahanagar* and Sita from *Subarnarekha*, and analyze their chequered fortune in comparison with Ghatak's protagonist Nita from *Meghe Dhaka Tara*,²¹⁷ who is remembered as the numero uno onscreen archetype of female martyrdom in the context of Bengal Partition films. Born

²¹⁷ This is reinstated by Satyajit Ray in the foreword of Ghatak's book *Cinema and I*: "Ritwik had the misfortune to be largely ignored by the Bengali film public in his lifetime. Only one of his films, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud-capped Star*) had been well received. The rest had brief runs, and generally lukewarm reception from professional film critics." According to Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, "If you are asked to choose a single film which captures the trauma and tragedy of Bengal with unmatched power and sensitivity, you choose, without a question, Ritwik Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Star Veiled By Clouds*, 1960)" (Bagchi and Dasgupta, eds. "Meghe Dhaka Tara" 219). Somdatta Mandal also iterates this point: "If we are asked to choose a single film which captures the trauma and tragedy of the Bengal Partition with unmatched power and sensitivity, we choose, without question, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud-Capped Star/The Star Veiled by Clouds*). Hailed as an unqualified masterpiece, it is a seminal depiction of the existential dilemma of the Indian lower middle-class, where the sacrifice of one good, meek, dutiful daughter ensures the survival of the rest of the family" (Mandal 69). Further, Manishita Dass states that *Meghe Dhaka Tara* is "arguably the only one of Ghatak's films that enjoyed a modicum of both commercial and critical success during his lifetime" (Dass 245).

within the ideological loop of *bhadralokdom*, all three female characters later take up economic, caste and class-based unconventional roles and choices. Therefore it is intriguing why one character should find better admissibility in the popular consciousness over the others. I suggest that the collective “Refugee Memory” does not grant Arati and Sita the glory that is due only to a sacrificing martyr like Nita, who resigns to a perfectly poignant death expected by her society. Because Sita and Arati transcend the Partition-centric stipulated representations of tragedy, and explore life’s meanings (or are circumstantially forced to do so) outside the “*bhadra*” refugee sensibilities, by performing the roles of public singer and housewife-turned-saleswoman, they break out from the idealized gendered context of mainstream Partition narratives.

The fact that specifically one out of these several filmic characters has left a deep impression on the popular psyche of Bengali audience, points to the sentimentality surrounding the limited nostalgic memorialization about middle-class refugee-ness. I demonstrate how *Meghe Dhaka Tara* promotes the refugee *bhadralok*’s desire to showcase the otherwise multifaceted moments of Partition in a fixed way, at the expense of relegating the Other refugee experiences into the zone of the “lesser” and “secondary” accounts. The preference for Nita as the ideal female refugee icon also exposes the *bhadralok* audience’s emotional parameters in contemporary post-Partition Bengali society. While such an audience could accept the patriarchy-consented economic “breakthrough” for the newly working refugee woman, her class, caste or gender fickleness had possibilities of provoking the risky question of transgression.²¹⁸ In

²¹⁸ By “breakthrough,” I imply in general the changes of social allocation and function for the refugee women in post-Partition West Bengal. Nita’s economic “emancipation” in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* cannot fend off her gendered exploitation while performing within a patriarchally designed ideal of “working woman,” as her cause of switching to the traditionally male-dominated role of bread-earner is rooted to the “feminized duty” of nurturing the family. On the other hand, although Arati’s journey begins quite similar to Nita, her working status in some ways destabilizes the bounds of gender and class, which gives her a separate entity from the family where she belongs. But Arati’s “breakthrough,” despite approaching transgression, can still be accepted by the “*bhadra*” audience. Finally, in case of Sita, there is only chaos in terms of her decision to marry beneath her paternal class and caste. As

light of this, I explore how Ghatak and Ray's cinematic techniques interplay with the temporal-spatial essence of Calcutta, in the decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The possible class and gender undercurrents determining the audience's greater identification with Nita than with Sita or Arati lead to the formation of culturally cherished stock events and archetypes. I observe if a "kitsch" surfaces between the audiences' horizon of expectations and Ghatak's filmic plots. My observation in turn helps to determine how such director-audience chemistry gives birth to a mainstream metanarrative of Partition.

When discussing Ghatak's audience, I principally point to those scholars who invest *bhadralok* immigrant's perspectives in comprehending the post-Partition period in reading his films. Their readings accentuate the likelihood of celebrating "kitsch" formations in Ghatak's films. My understanding of the term "kitsch" is informed by Milan Kundera's analysis of the uninventive, politically overemotional yet dictatorial culture of communist Czechoslovakia under Soviet invasion. "Kitsch" helps to understand the refugee *bhadralok*'s sentimentalized memory and its use in Ghatak's films, which has similar relation to power and politics as the wave of "cultural communism" in Czechoslovakia. For instance, Paulomi Chakraborty's analysis of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* infers: "The film does not preach, or even morally sanction, the kind of gendered violence to which Nita allows herself to be subjected...the subjectivity of the refugee women...is not constructed as one that can be retrogressively folded back into patriarchy" ("A Critique of Metaphor-Making" 244, 259). Chakraborty refuses to see the film as a tribute to the heroic martyrdom of the maternal, self-sacrificing Nita. Yet, according to her, "the 'failure' of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* appears more radical...than the facile success of the more agential narratives" (259-260). On the other hand, Himani Bannerji reflects that Nita's life is conceived

such a type of transgression cannot be contained within the bourgeois social system, both she and her Dalit husband are made to die in the film.

as a tragedy and “not a triumph through the transgression of gender roles or extension of social space and presence” (3807, quoted in Chakraborty 254). Contrary to these assertions, I demonstrate that in Nita’s “failure” lies the successful becoming of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* into a typified Bengal Partition film, which no other “progressive” cinematic plot, such as *Mahanagar*, is destined to enjoy. *Meghe Dhaka Tara* gives the audience what it wants to know and already knows, in fact what the post-Partition Bengali culture has instituted as “Knowledge” viz-a-viz immigration and “Bengali Refugees.” What Chakraborty reads in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* as a “critique from within” (254) is, in my analysis, a bourgeois-turned-Marxian attitude, which brings to the forefront an empathetic view about the refugee community through a prosaic gendered message. In treating a woman in the capacity of Goddess, there is an echoing of the way in which a collective middle-class psyche functions. I argue that the film’s popularity lies in this dual attitude of criticizing and yet celebrating the archetypes. The Communist note, a very important feature in Ghatak’s work, is delivered through such lionizing of “virtuosity” of “The Refugee Woman.”²¹⁹

²¹⁹ The scene where the audience, as Chakraborty rightly states, is “tricked into” thinking another refugee woman to be Nita, tends to conflate all hardworking, struggling female refugees into a universal image, such that the larger political message becomes higher than their individuality. However, the logic of conflating and confusing Nita with her friend signifies that they both signify same type of refugee woman, unified by their archetypal iconization and sacrifice. One would never do this mistake between either of these two women and Gita, because the latter is not the essence of the refugee femininity that Ghatak specifically deals with. Ghatak’s unilinear depiction will be greatly disrupted if Gita is allowed to define the refugee woman. Rather than Ira Bhaskar’s suggestion that this anonymous woman suggests a “perpetuation of archetype,” who, unlike Nita, does not concede to walking barefoot, but keeps limping in her torn slippers, I agree with Rajadhyaksha’s analysis. Rajadhyaksha reads: “in the end, as her tragedy becomes universal we see the archetype going beyond Nita, as the individual in her cries out her desire to live” (54). I also support Chakraborty’s observation that she is “the woman limping towards a space that is postmetaphoric. She signifies the collective of women who live on beyond the death of the individual Nita, and struggle against the metaphor through their labour, staking a claim that the metaphor denies them” (252). However, I read it as an intentional political apparatus on the part of Ghatak, once again, that the storyline ends every time with the death of the “goddess-woman” – Nita, Sita – as if to exclude from his notion of “Refugee Experience” the feminine “postmetaphoric” individualism, because such individualism no longer attends any patriarchal political agenda. His frame of narratives ends with the feminine martyrdom itself, and hardly details the span of feminine hope. While Paulomi Chakraborty sees “a particularly rich feminist gesture of ‘living on’ beyond the metaphor” (253) in the anonymous girl’s continuing with life after Nita’s death, or Binu’s humming the songs of

Ghatak's "radical" experimentation in cinema is not divorced from the post-Partition communism-garbed new patriarchy. His films indulge the pan-Indian expectations around the "women's issue" and "women's question," which had paradoxically enhanced yet also cramped women's performances, by placing them within well-defined fields. The way in which questions of class, caste and gender have been differently addressed by Ghatak and Ray, highlight the two film-makers' dissimilar political stands and philosophical angles viz-a-viz Partition, as well as reinforce the contradicting realities about refugee existence, which could hardly be tied to a singular meaning.²²⁰

Especially while studying Ghatak's films, my chapter's approach affirms Ananya Jahanara Kabir's position that the past has been treated in a problematic way by the artists. In the context of the Partition films, Kabir suggests a more productive dialogue with the past by "using artwork and analysis not merely to continue valorizing some sites of memory – such as the [east] Bengali village – but to unravel how those processes shape the present, even by marginalizing other modes of remembering..." (Kabir n.p.). She points to the necessity of a "complicated memory" that irresolutely struggles against naturalized omissions and selections, "in order to reach a more searing level of honesty within ourselves as compromised subjects of a still-traumatic rupture" (n.p.).

In the case of Ghatak's Partition films, the memories, to begin with, bring up unconventional perspectives that counter nationalistic narratives. However, they have a

dead Sita and moving forward to a fresh future, it is debatable how such a message can be conceived as feminist, if it sprouts on the bier of the female characters.

²²⁰ In Shelley Feldman's words: "The varied idioms-political, social, testimonial, literary, documentary – used for uncovering, accessing, and representing the past suggest as much about the myriad expressions, interests and points of view that shape current debates on the 1947 Partition as they do about the diverse methodological approaches deployed to explore this period in subcontinental history" (Feldman, "Feminist Interruptions" 167-68).

homogenizing tendency, as they bank only on conservative *bhadralok* ideologies, obscuring the non-*bhadralok* refugee's subjectivity. Such memory formation looks back at the Partition-induced tragedy in terms of a shared resentment that engulfed men's "possessions," which include their women and territorial ownership.²²¹ Although women play the central characters in Ghatak's films, their choice is overstrained by mythological and historico-political symbolisms. Having to justify their metaphorical functions, Ghatak's heroines fail to accentuate their worldly, pragmatic and thus more realistic dimensions. As Ghatak fixes their drawbacks and accomplishments within the gamut of brahmanical Hindu knowledge system, they are inclined to blend in with the official gendered version of a mythicized history. As a result, their personal pains, joys and aspirations are not allowed to critique, defy or parody the sacred myths of *Sati*, *Sita* and *Durga*.

***Meghe Dhaka Tara*: A Brief Overview**

Meghe Dhaka Tara revolves around a lower middle-class *bhadra* Bengali refugee family, which is cast against the excruciating framework of the 1950s post-Partition Calcutta setting. The female protagonist Nita epitomizes the highly prevalent figure of the unmarried female breadwinners from middle-class Bengali refugee families. The film depicts her as a symbol of sacrifice, who becomes a scapegoat for future improvement of her kin. By deciding not to pursue her Master's degree but instead support the family with her income, by giving up her fiancé to her younger sister Gita for marriage, and ultimately contracting the venomous syndromes of tuberculosis, Nita becomes the unforgettable and universal epitome of the moribund nourishing

²²¹ As Hamid Naficy notes, and as I mention earlier in the thesis, the typified symbol formation in mainstream refugee memory consciously feminizes the home and hearth: "Significantly, the discourse of memory feminized the house as an enclosure of femininity and domesticity, associated with motherland and reproduction. This is how many exiles feminize the homeland...In the accented cinema, the house is an intensely charged place and a signifying trope" (169). Ghatak's Partition films predominantly bear these tropes.

Mother. As Ashis Rajadhyaksha analyzes, in this film, women are but fragments of the unified powerful figure of the Great Mother. Of the three female characters, the mistress of the household embodies the destructive potential of Goddess *Kali*, the elder daughter Nita of the sustaining Mother-giver *Jagaddhatri* and the younger daughter Gita of the sensuous female, who is imaged as a metaphor of marriage, sexuality and reproduction.²²² In Kumar Shahani's words:

The triangular division taken from Tantrik abstraction, is the key to the understanding of this complex film. The inverted triangle represents, in the Indian tradition, fertility and femininity principle ("Nature, in the End, is Grandly Indifferent" 52).

Tragedy occurs in the film with the impossibility to reconcile these three traditionally demarcated feminine qualities of nurture, sensuality and cruelty. Each of the females is limited in not being able to switch into another's role even once, which could have given shape to a comprehensive feudal social anima (Rajadhyaksha 53-54). Gita would as predictably not share the burden of the familial needs as Nita would not breach the bounds of obedience that locate her prudery within the middle-class bourgeois value-system. The unbalanced scale that reinforces Gita's selfishness at the cost of Nita's self-denial, operates effectively under the control of their mother. Just as Goddess *Kali*'s destruction becomes a prequel to a new creation, the mother, it seems, becomes the announcer of a spontaneous and impassive natural law, which selects the blossoming spirit of Gita over the fading presence of Nita. This portent is visible almost

²²² Regarding the deployment of archetypes, Rajadhyaksha notes: "...the unconscious is like a maze with images form the immediate to the timeless dominating it...The simple image belongs to the primary level of an imprint, a visual expression of what is felt within...In their artistic expression, these move beyond their individuality and approximate to those that emerge through collective activity. And it is this activity, within which also comes the work of the artist, that the images expressed become larger, achieve a universal form" (123). Universal archetypes and collective unconscious is also a means of reasserting human as a species being, thereby overcoming the isolation that Renaissance had created through divorcing the mythic narrative from the realist portrayal (121). The process of making the mystical is through the replacement of reality with the idea of reality, such that "reality is expressed not as itself but as another reality. Ordinary empirical fact has not its own but an alien spirit for its law..." (120). Marx's rationale that the advent of knowledge destroys mythology is consistent with this idea of mystical: "All mythology overcomes and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in the imagination and by the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them" (122).

throughout the film – in Nita’s attachment towards her childhood photograph and thereby the past – compared to Gita’s looking ahead to a fresh future. As the future is reaped and ripens in the form of a male child in Gita’s womb, Nita clings more often to her prized photo. Once it falls and breaks from her hand, her only confidence seems to have been fractured forever. The immediate scene that follows is her imprisonment as a micro-entity within the panoramic scape of the Shillong mountains.

As a member of the modern post-Partition Bengali society, Nita is principally an exploited female, whose oppressed position is sanctimoniously covered with glorious goddess-like virtues. I agree with Paulomi Chakraborty that she is a “complete suppression, a forceful erasure of the body that is present, corporeal, and labouring for the metaphor. The stronger the metaphor grows, the greater is the erasure of the body on which the metaphor locates itself” (“A Critique of Metaphor-Making” 245). Nevertheless, I do not agree with Chakraborty’s reading of the film as a critique of this “regime of metaphor” that erases the tactile human body. Similarly, I do not agree with Jacob Levich’s observation that in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, “There is infinite compassion in [this] darkly hued family portrait, but not a trace of sentimentality” (n.p.), and that the film’s only goal is to expose the “dirtiest family secret...that love and loyalty are conditioned by financial necessity” (n.p.). Rather, beneath the veneer of criticism, Nita’s pursuance of and victimization by the archetypal ideals, with which she serves the patriarchal society till the end, is relentlessly eulogized. As Nita repeatedly says, albeit sarcastically – first to her fiancé Sanat and then to her brother Shankar – to doll her up and encase her within a glass frame – so that she can be spared of all hardships, there is an indirect defamation of the “vain bourgeois *bhadramahila*,” and by that means, admiration of her own overstated contribution in the face of current adversity.

Gita and Nita's infirm and mentally unstable father scorns the cruel economic compulsions that they have to undergo as refugees, where one daughter's future can be secured only by sacrificing the other. He tells Nita to leave her room and make space for Gita, who would then use her dying sister's bed as her own post-partum retreat. Such a comment not only refers to the stiff competition for shelter that most immigrants faced in West Bengal, but also repeats the Darwinian and Eugenic notions of Survival of the Fittest. Darwin's principle postulates that the ones who are eliminated in the struggle for existence are unfit to live. As a more extremist version, eugenics science proposes that a race can be improved by discouraging persons with genetic disorder or "undesirable traits" from reproducing (See Hawkins 216-217). In a similar way, the poor refugee family's only option is to privilege the vigorous, the fertile and the strongly assertive individuals among them over the weak. It is therefore not a guiltless statement made by Nita's elder brother Shankar in one of the closing scenes, where, in response to her only-once expressed desire for life in the entire narrative – "*Dada ami banchbo*" ("Brother, even I want to live") – he retorts in a discomfiting tone: "Have you gone mad, Khuki?" While there is no suspecting the brother's unalloyed love for the ailing sister, it is primarily the conservative and worn-out social apparatus speaking through him, by pointing out how unnatural, even insane, Nita's imploration sounds. Asking for something as elemental as her right and wish to live for the first time ever, Nita is nipped in the bud like a thoughtless child or a naïve irrational being. The same brother who had earlier in the narrative scolded Nita for being an unselfish "emotional fool," later calls her "mad," in order to forestall the difficult request made by her. His immediate reaction to her frenzied outburst is to call for a nurse from the sanatorium in order to control her, which implies that he is attempting to fence off her behavior within a clinical rather than social or emotional import. In doing so, the brother is neither

unfeeling towards her misfortunes nor uncritical of the society that has produced her as a victim, but only too powerless to challenge the given circumstances.²²³

On the other hand, Gita, the younger sister and, as shown in the film, the “selected one” in the post-Partition-generated “survival of the fittest,” is not the protagonist of Ghatak’s storyline. She is a hedonist by nature, who does not refrain from her regular desire for new clothes and other similar indulgences that might be otherwise considered excesses, given the family’s economic plight. She marries her sister’s elite fiancé and wears the same ornament that her sister was supposed to wear at her own wedding, and later gives birth to a son, thereby stereotypically sealing off her conjugal life with middle-class notions of marital bliss. Gita cannot therefore become the central heroine in the male-invested impression of Partition focusing on the middle-class’ “fall.”²²⁴ This is because, in the tragic rendition of *bhadralok* middle-class immigrant’s account, the “superwoman” who may qualify as the protagonist ought to bear traces of the heart-rending aftershock of her larger social scenario. Consequently, a woman like Gita, who stands apart from the collective description of loss and exploits the circumstance to feed her own needs, can never be seen in a positive light. It is contradictory that the East Bengali popular memory glorifies the refugee male founder-actors of the squatter

²²³ One must not judge the brother only by his ultimate fame as a singer. In the earlier part of the film, he exuded several non-*bhadralok* traits, the most prominent ones being borrowing money or commodities on loan, both from his family members and outsiders, and proclaiming his fervent passion for music, an interest conventionally associated with the weaker non-virile faculties. Lacking the chauvinistic behavior that vouch for “true” machismo, he is marked off from the generic concept of *bhadralok*. Being economically on the fringes of the society, this poor refugee male, perpetually struggling for vocation, could hardly generate a patriarchal social voice, and would rather function as its marionette.

²²⁴ Like Ghatak’s cinema, Sunil Ganguly’s novel *Arjun* brings epic references of *Mahabharata* to describe the historical context of post-Partition refugee colonies (Mookerjee-Leonard, “The Diminished Man”). However, while Ghatak’s archetypal female characters Nita and Sita are overwhelmed by the enormity of the epic and mythical metaphors, the male protagonist Arjun’s “fall” enables possibilities of modern individuality. Moreover, Arjun as a poor *bhadralok* refugee overcomes all hurdles in the end to achieve his goals, whereas the Dalit character Abhiram is vanquished and killed.

colonies as heroes, whereas on a smaller scale, the same claims for space, right to desire and fancy for freedom made by an emphatic section of refugee females fail to attract similar support. The East Bengali “able-bodied” refugee males, who were eventually considered the “heads” of respective family units and provided with regular enfranchisement and citizenship status, signaled a historic phase of political radicalism. Yet, this same population harbored the gender-conscious dream of the reactionary bourgeoisie, at the core of which was the ideal female nourisher, overburdened with the patriarchal baggage yet tolerant and ready to suffer more.

It is also worth noting how different socio-political variables shaping up Nita and her youngest brother Montu within the same *bhadralok* family cause them to respond dissimilarly to the questions of power, space, opportunity and hierarchy. Even as both of them hold some degrees of economic facility, Nita as the female earning member is looked upon as the source of shared familial expenses, whereas Montu uses his income to improve his own status. Their attitudes are also demonstrative of their respective occupation – Nita making a living as a tutor and an office employee, who bears the ethical responsibility of the poor but *bhadra* immigrant community, and Montu working as a labour in a factory, for whom his own individual upward mobility orders higher over collective familial well-being. Having rid himself of the answerability that is involved in a gentleman’s way of living, Montu can choose to live his life in segregation from the rest of the family members and nourish his personal dreams of becoming a sportsperson. In contrast, Nita’s premature entry into the world of earning occurs at the cost of giving up her aspirations and wants for higher studies and conjugal fulfillment.

While many film critics read *Meghe Dhaka Tara* through the primeval model of Hindu archetypes, where Nita is the symbol of Goddess *Jagaddhatri* (the Mother Giver) and the domestic courtyard a site of collective yearnings, which materialize to the detriment of her well-

being,²²⁵ they do not question why none of the corresponding male characters – her elder brother Shankar, her father, her fiancé Sanat or her younger brother Montu – are shown in similar mythological shades. It is a bigoted vision to define only the female characters' possible field of actions according to Hindu mythology, while locating the males within the contemporary modern socio-historical milieu.²²⁶ In most cases, the *bhadramahila* refugees' good-natured compliance with and assistance to the fundamentally patriarchal nature of refugee struggles adhere mythic perfections to an image of woman, rather than grounding her within her current reality.

²²⁵ Ira Bhaskar draws a parallel between Nita's image and that of *Jagaddhatri*, the benevolent facet of the Feminine Principle, whose origin is the *havyagni* (ritual fire) where mortal sacrifices are made. The courtyard of the refugee home wherein exist the material desires of the family is therefore superimposed with her image. Nita's mother personifies the violent figure of *Chandi*, as her preying upon Nita to keep the hearth going is comparable to *Chandi's* feeding upon life to sustain life. Bhaskar studies Ghatak's employment of archetypes as a means of addressing the current distorted values of life. Subsequently, these archetypes' earlier reverential standpoints are made to dissolve and become part of the plebeian socio-political message. In the same way, Rajadhyaksha also notes the purpose of archetypes in Ghatak's cinema to foreground human struggles, by interweaving drama at the most complex level. For more, see Bhaskar's "Myth and Ritual: Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*" and Rajadhyaksha's *Ritwik Ghatak: A Return to the Epic*.

²²⁶ While his name is close to mythological *Sita's* spouse's name, and his mother's name is also Kaushalya, Abhiram is different from the patriarchal figure of *Rama*. For example, unlike *Rama*, Abhiram's death incapacitates him from "defeating" the social vices that urges his wife to compromise her "dignity." Even as *Sita* and Abhiram live in a similar exile after their marriage as the epic characters of *Rama* and *Sita*, in Abhiram's character, rather than the heroic shades of Aryan-born *Vishnu's* incarnation, the failed Dalit of the contemporary times becomes much more prominent. What is more, even though his scholarly virtues may be compared to the highly accomplished mythical figure of *Rama*, his social rejection and death are not so much the loss of an intellectual person as an inconsequential elimination of a Dalit. On the other hand, *Sita's* brother Ishwar can be seen both in the image of God in general (as the meaning of his name suggests) as well as *Daksha*, the mythological character known to be *Sati's* father, who had made similar incestuous advances towards *Sati* as Ishwar did to *Sita*. Nevertheless, Ishwar, rather than a mythical embodiment, is more remembered in the film as a lower middle-class *bhadralok* refugee, who moves socially upward by way of compromising his morals, and is eventually sucked into the city life. In *Jukti, Takko ar Gappo* (1974), Neelkantho's character, by virtue of his name, evokes the Hindu god *Shiva*, but rather than bearing the superhuman responsibilities as akin to a celestial figure, he, unlike Nita, quickly devolves into the "representative of an irresponsible middle-class intelligentsia, wasted and degenerated" (Kapur, "Articulating the Self"). It is thus not to say that the male characters cannot be drawn parallel to male archetypes, but because women like *Sita*, *Nita* or *Gita* lack a distinct public domain outside of the familial webs, they cannot be extricated from those archetypes. There is no such idealized and transcendental idea of Father, Brother and Husband, as circumscribes and, in fact, curbs the existence of the refugee woman. In that sense, women are more one-dimensionally conceived than their male relations.

***Subarnarekha*: A Brief Overview**

As a characteristic Ghatak film, *Subarnarekha* contains historical and mythical undertones, and is based on the genre of melodrama. The story revolves around the Hindu refugee Ishwar Chakraborty and his juvenile sister Sita, who take refuge in West Bengal's Natun Jiban Colony. Following a Dalit woman's abduction from the refugee camp, Ishwar takes the responsibility of her son Abhiram, and together Sita, Abhiram and Ishwar move to a new province near the Subarnarekha River, where Ishwar gets a job in a factory. Even as he brings up Abhiram in a *bhadralok*-style, he is reluctant to give his sister's hand in marriage to him. As a result of his disapproval, Sita and Abhiram elope and marry, but later they are ruined by poverty. The tragedy heightens as Abhiram, a bus driver, crushes a child under his wheels and is assassinated by an enraged mob. In turn, Sita is forced to take up prostitution to bring up their only son Binu. The film ends with an intoxicated Ishwar visiting his sister's house as a client, upon seeing whom Sita commits suicide.

Coincidences form a vital part in the narrativity of *Subarnarekha*. In Ghatak's own words:

I agree that coincidences virtually overflow in *Subarnarekha*. And yet the logic of the biggest coincidence, the brother arriving at his sister's house provoked me to orchestrate coincidence per se in the very structuring of the film. It is a tricky but fascinating form verging on the epic. The coincidence is forceful in its logic as the brother going to any woman amounts to his going to *somebody else's sister* ("Subarnarekha – A Review" n.p., emphasis mine).

Such chance happenings become a powerful gimmick in Ghatak's plot to typify, through a specific micro incident of extreme dimensions, the possible gruesome nature of the happenings in the current macro social space outside of cinema. What is peculiar, however, is his way of interpreting the particular coincidence in the plot. By calling every prostitute formed by Partition

as “somebody else’s sister,” the director endangers stepping into the overused bourgeois-nationalistic idea of treating the refugee females in terms of domestic relations – mothers, daughters and sisters – thereby upholding an affected sense of male morality.²²⁷ Ghatak’s statement indirectly also agrees with the stereotypical notion that if a woman is not related to a respectable gentleman, then it might be morally excusable to perceive her body as an object for male sexual desire. In other words, the only circumstances that produce a *bhadralok* as culpable are when he trespasses another *bhadralok*’s “domain” through illegitimate overtures with his female kin, or when he pollutes his own. Nothing is prescribed about a woman who is not guarded by such recognizable familial seams. In *Subarnarekha*, Ghatak intentionally chooses a noble set-up in order to show the extent of demoralization, where a refined and educated gentleman risks desecrating his own sister.

The director’s message about the Dalit character Abhiram, whose entire life swerves between non-*bhadralok* descent and *bhadralok* upbringing and aspirations, is dubious. Brought up with care by Ishwar, Abhiram could have acquired a lofty fortune, only if he, in his later life, had refused to identify a poor Dalit woman as his mother. Following his rejection from Ishwar’s haven, Abhiram becomes a complicated entity, who acquires *bhadralok*-like education and mannerisms, but who, instead of being allowed to marry and settle at the core of *bhadralokdom*,

²²⁷ P.K. Dutta points out: “In the numerous poems written by nationalists, especially those with extremist persuasions, the Mother was one who has already fulfilled her role through giving birth and distributing nurture. Consequently, the Mother could not but be a passive figure. And this gave supreme importance to men’s (that is, the son’s) agency, for it was up to them to do their duty to their motherland which had fulfilled its side of the bargain by spawning and nurturing them...The figure of the Sister was ideally suited to a project in which the woman’s choice was transferred from her personal desires to the defense of her community. In other words, a woman’s public agency was privileged over her individual choices. Woman’s public activism was made to subsume the area of choices which impinged on gender relations. The woman was given a new sphere of activity by Hindu communalism. Admittedly, in many respects, this reformulated the traditional web of relationships in which the woman was located. But it did so by avoiding any questioning of the basis of her relationships or expanding the area of her choices as a person” (71-72).

is discarded at its fringes. Ishwar, who is an upper-caste Hindu immigrant and afterwards a high-rank officer, is completely assimilated with the elitist culture, whereas Abhiram as a Dalit intellectual, who is not assisted by enough economic or moral support, fails to build up his potential for revolution. Between Abhiram's prospects of becoming a journalist and his ending up into the profession of bus-driver, lies the death of a Dalit scholar's dreams. Ghatak shows that a Dalit immigrant either has to progress under the shadow of a *bhadralok* Hindu benefactor, and shape his ambitions according to the latter's dictate, or is left to fend alone in the traditional path of his ancestors. By choosing journalism over Ishwar's advice of pursuing higher studies in Germany, Abhiram loses both the opportunities, and is forced to embrace the life of a driver. It is not wrong to imagine that journalism could have given Abhiram the platform for expressing his standpoint as a Dalit or otherwise. Unlike the *bhadralok* Ishwar, who could afford to join forces with the moneyed-class capitalists, journalism would enable Abhiram to communicate with the masses. In reality, the post-Partition period had facilitated a fresh scope for Dalit refugees to socially go up and compete with the *bhadralok* immigrants, and many Dalits had prospered under the changing circumstances.²²⁸ Even though the fact also remains that in many instances, Dalits were and still are at the mercy of the upper-castes, as Ghatak shows in case of Abhiram, the latter's death in the film is, however, not supposed to convey any realistic message. Had Abhiram gained access to proper resources and eventually led a successful life, instead of being hurled into the gloomy mazes of slum, the film would have strongly distressed the *bhadralok* audiences' expectations. In other words, continued existence of the "Dalit *bhadralok*" would

²²⁸ In the opening of Chapter 1, I have discussed an array of post-Partition Dalit Bengali scholars, who expressed their social, cultural and economic concerns through writing, which helped to etch their identity in separation from the mainstream writers.

have disputed the status quo in representation, to which Ghatak's ostensibly "radical" cinema is committed.

In the scene where Abhiram asks Sita to borrow money from Ishwar, adversity makes an inferior image out of his otherwise upright personality. Despite being a docile woman, Ghatak, in this case, portrays Sita as a staunch upper-caste *bhadramahila*, who has not forgotten her middle-class integrity and who refuses to ask her hostile brother for help. I read this as Ghatak's attempt at mirroring the mindset of the *bhadralok* audience. Moreover, although Abhiram tries to replicate his family life in line with the model of *bhadralok* households, by restraining Sita's mobility to the confines of home, his death and Sita's stepping out of the domestic boundaries and becoming a "public woman" acts as a blow to his assumed virility. The fact that Sita is only allowed to use her vocal talent in singing lullabies to their son as long as Abhiram is alive, but forced to perform before clients after his death, makes a sarcastic commentary about the Dalit male's "masculinity."²²⁹ That his education cannot help him to rise above the innate caste identity and he dies under public wrath, his wife's "honour" cannot be preserved and he cannot provide for his family's needs – emasculates Abhiram's character with respect to the traditional definition of *bhadralok*. Ghatak reverts to the obsolete caste status-quo of Hinduism, by choosing to highlight Abhiram's "Dalit-ness" above all his positive potentials. The plot portrays a chain of causality which validates the brahminical caste-system. The talented Dalit ought to be

²²⁹ The double-standards of the *bhadralok* characters in *Subarnarekha* come up in the way they treat Sita's singing. Ishwar diminishes her vocal talent into a mere accessory of a proficient bride-to-be, by forcing her to sing in front of the prospective groom's family. According to Ratnabali Chatterjee, once considered an elite practice in the indigenous perception, singing and dancing under the colonial auspices later on transformed into an expression of overt sexuality: "Once a sign of class, signifying the courtesan, it was now construed as abusive epithets using against the common prostitute" (Chatterjee 170). Molded by the European Victorian influence, the *bhadralok* class, instead of valuing the artistic fineness of a female performer, would judge her aesthetics at the level of raw physicality. By that logic, a *bhadramahila*'s singing talent ideally ought to become the ownership of a single male gaze fitted within the legitimacy of marriage, rather than be posed as an asset of many. While Abhiram too is very fond of Sita's voice, he, much like Ishwar, regards it as something to be kept under strict supervision, and refrains from using it as a means of bread-earning, even in their worst days of economic crisis.

eradicated lest he unsettles the social rungs of hierarchy; subsequently, his upper-caste-born wife, who breaks away from her inherent status to marry him, has to follow suit, only after additional sufferance of humiliation. Somdatta Mandal notes this moralistic turn in the story, where human *karma* is linked to fate:

Haraprasad, the schoolmaster who has nurtured the new home of his fellow unfortunates, accuses Ishwar of being a coward and for thinking only of his own welfare and not that of the others around him. We are therefore plunged into the heart of a moral tale that can only end in tragedy (72).

Critics may argue that Ghatak's films contain a proclaimed melodramatic and hyperbolic quality, but that does not deter the logic that killing Abhiram, a rebellious Dalit, in the mid of the screenplay and turning his wife Sita into a "public woman," is symptomatic of the director's biased and didactic viewpoint.

Abhiram's character can also be understood in terms of a dystopian hero's traits. According to Patrick Parrinder, a dystopian hero is always identified by his "unsuitability" and alienation with respect to his social setting, even before he meets the object of his love. Correspondingly, the dystopian heroine always chooses the "taboo" partner because "the mechanism of sexual selection," unlike in case of utopian romance, is not perfected in her society" (Parrinder 8). Despite ample warnings, the dystopian hero remains unaware about the social prohibitions, prior to entering the dystopian cosmos. In *Subarnarekha*, dystopia sets up in the form of resistance that Abhiram as a Dalit faces while dealing with the *bhadralok* affiliates, such as Ishwar and Sita. Even as Abhiram's entry into the elite space is made possible with Ishwar's help, his becoming the veritable *bhadralok* is cut short by an untimely death. The disappointment in Abhiram and Sita's marriage and thereby the beginning of a luckless journey is forewarned by the fact that their marriage takes place without Sita's *bhadralok* brother Ishwar's consent. The inter-caste marriage and eloping sets forth their dystopic miseries, which

forces them into a non-*bhadra* mode of existence, and almost submits them to Ishwar's charity. The sense of "stigma" that marks the man-woman relationship in a dystopian world intensifies, as Ishwar unknowingly makes an incestuous advance towards his sister. The dystopian world thus engulfs all the characters by its subversive world values. Like a modern dystopian society that functions through a pattern of secrecy and inadmissibility, in *Subarnarekha*, the anticlimax surfaces in a sudden but predictable manner. Erin O'Donnell points out that Ishwar's breaking of his glasses and momentarily turning blind under drunken condition indicates his literal and symbolic visionlessness. This also pertains to his earlier inability to value Abhiram, which had pushed Sita into her current consequences. In fact, the motif of blindness stays with Ishwar throughout the process of his upward mobility and corresponding moral decadence. If Ishwar's incestuous overtures towards Sita have a blind Oedipal quality which makes him a victim and a perpetrator at the same time, as well as carries the seed of his corruption and ignorance, Sita is like Jocasta in her helpless awareness about this corruption.

Death of Ghatak's Heroines: Why Nita and not Sita?

The turn of events demand both Nita in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and Sita in *Subarnarekha* to be removed from the heart of the society, to the sanatorium and the slum environments respectively. Both the films are alike in their ending with violence, be it as indirect as isolating a dying woman or as direct as the blood-spattering clothes of Sita's brother Ishwar signifying her suicide. Although both the female protagonists die in the end, their respective deaths bring out two different facets of the male society. Nita is a dutiful female who has formerly been of high utility to her kinfolk, but afterwards deteriorates and fails to render service. Ghatak depicts the society to be relatively more sympathetic towards her, and even stricken with a collective guilt, as is expressed in Nita's old father's words: "You were the docile daughter, incapable of taking

burdens, yet you were made to bear all the odds of the family.” Even as her relatives turn a deaf ear to her plea to live longer, Nita, in her death, becomes the quintessence of the “Female Refugee Victim.” Sita, on the other hand, has rejected her elder brother’s chosen suitor and defiantly taken up a heretical life, by marrying a Dalit. Her defiance puts to test Ishwar’s role as an able guardian and patriarch. Subsequently, Ghatak shows the avalanche in her fate as a befitting punishment for her un-*bhadramahila*-like behaviour. After Abhiram’s death, the society pushes Sita into the “immoral” world of prostitution, before eliminating her completely. Her suicide, in order to check her brother’s unknowing sexual advances, puts things straight in one go – it acts as a penance for her earlier disobedience towards her brother’s commands, and brings her back into the moral space of *bhadramahila*-hood that she had earlier challenged by marrying a Dalit. Nevertheless, unlike Nita, Sita’s suicide has an ignoble connotation, which marks her as a vulnerable, impulsive and somewhat blameworthy woman, far from the ideal of “Refugee *Bhadramahila*.”²³⁰ In taking her own life, Sita takes up the charge of punishing herself, which disregards the paternalistic intervention of the society. Nita’s death seems to be much more “exemplary” by patriarchal standards, as she does not fight back the death that is ordained to her by her society.

Myths, Archetypes and Music in Ghatak’s Films

Ghatak’s revised concept of melodrama interlaces materials from Indian mythology and folk practices with Upanishadic, Marxian and Jungian philosophy, to shape a personalized

²³⁰ This is despite the fact that Sita’s character is throughout shaped by her closest surviving male relatives. For example, during Abhiram’s term of life, Sita leads the life of a poor but *bhadra* housewife with no independent earning. Her entrée into the life of a public singer can be seen as an urge to earn for her son’s future and security. Lastly, upon encountering her brother Ishwar as her client, her upper-caste morals are reinvigorated, prompting her to take away her own life than face the mortification of incest.

narrative form.²³¹ He sees the genre as offering an artist the scope to “leap from the ridiculous to the sublime” (Malcolm 186). The relationships among his filmic characters evoke myths and fairytales, such as Ishwar’s dislike towards Abhiram in *Subarnarekha* as a parallel to *Sati*’s father *Daksha*’s loathing towards her chosen husband, *Shiva*. In fact, Ishwar’s unsuspecting incestuous advances towards Sita are the same as *Daksha*’s sexual overtures towards *Sati* under the influence of a magic garland, as is described in *Devibhāgavata* (O’Donnell, ““Woman” and “Homeland”” 198). Moreover, Sita’s killing herself with a knife draws on her mythical namesake, who, upon being suspected and banished by her husband Rama, had felt “as if he had cut her down with a sword” (O’Donnell, “The Assemblage of “Woman”” 196). Like in case of *Ramayana*’s *Sita* who plunges herself into fire to prove her chastity, or *Sati* who immolates herself in the fire of her concentration (*yogagni*), Ghatak, too, gives paramount importance to women’s ethics.²³² In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Nita’s ruin is forewarned by the local grocer, who compares her to the fabled character of Sindbad the Sailor. Similar to Sindbad who had helped the Old Man of the Sea to cross a stream on his shoulder, but the Old Man would not descend and tenaciously cling on to him, Nita’s family is insinuated as an inescapable burden on her (“The Assemblage of “Woman”” 206).

²³¹ Diderot’s imagination of “a *genre sérieux*” grounds to a “serious treatment of private lives and their dilemmas,” and depends for effect on an illusion of lived experience or “emotional rhetoric.” Such a genre would infuse sublimity with the ordinary, and depend on melodrama for pantomime and action. Afterwards, melodrama’s aesthetic also comes to be associated with heroic dimensions, overt excitement and cosmic ambitions (Brooks 83).

²³² According to Spivak, the authorship in the Puranas is generally male, and even as women speak, the frame-narrator is masculine. The myth of *Sati*’s dismemberment (by *Vishnu*’s wheel) symbolizes the “efforts at controlling the feminine as female.” Spivak sees the *Devibhāgavata* as a spiraling structure entailing feminine empowerment and male enactment. In the supernatural gendered division of labor, the male’s hubris over the autonomy of their action cuts them off from empowerment, stoops them before the female power, until the entire cycle resumes again (Spivak, “Moving Devi” 142).

In *Subarnarekha*, the confrontation between Sita and a *bahurupi* or travelling performer, dressed up in the formidable image of Goddess *Kali*, portends tragedy in the impending future. The figure of *Kali* becomes the extreme point of figurative historicism, in which rationalism merges with sensuousness (Rajadhyaksha 128). *Kali*'s physical manifestation is the final point of an essence already introduced lyrically, and the myth surrounding her locates the present in the history of Partition. Besides the symbol of a crumbling civilization, *Kali* is also the mirror of Sita's tomorrow, her alter-ego and latent possibilities, from a shy girl to a harlot. In Bengali culture, *Kali*'s symbol is associated with the homeless shameless female, who trods on her husband's body unclothed, and the Tantric appellations endearingly describe her as the self-willed woman. This scene in the film is therefore the manifestation of extremities of *bhadramahila* as a symbol – the same Sita who, like her namesake, the paragon feminine embodiment, follows her husband through the harsh bends of life can, upon the call of her maternal obligation, turn into a public entertainer. In confronting Sita with *Kali*, the scene becomes the kernel of the plot where Sita is *Kali* herself. This is a bold statement where Ghatak, for once, moves out from the archetypal hold, by not alienating the “good woman” from the “bad woman,” but putting them face to face, in fact, merging them with one another. The rigid dichotomies further dissolve with the fact that the *bahurupi* artist dressed in *Kali*'s costume is in reality a male. By incorporating a member from the professional groups of transvestites, Ghatak reckons the *bhadralok*-constructed social ideals to be as false as the male performer's feminine make-up. According to Rajadhyaksha, there are images in this film that arrive from completely different origins and contrast each other with respect to their divergent traditions. As the *Malhar raga* comes to picturize the murky rain in the city, the drunken men compare the liquor served in urban tavern to *amruta* (nectar) and the *swaras* (musical notes) of the *ragas* blend with noisy city

backdrops, there is an inversion of the *rasas*, leading to what Haraprasad in the film calls *bibhatsa*.²³³ Rajadhyaksha also sees Ghatak's use of *khayals* and *ragas* as helping the narrative to move beyond linearity and establish contradictory tensions by breaking forth the expressionist gesture in the narrative (126).

Critics analyze the use of archetypes in Ghatak's films as carrying an avant-garde intent. According to Kumar Shahani's reading of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarekha*, Ghatak abstains from petty-bourgeois tendencies of "realism," which either presents physical reality in terms of pathos, or makes it more palatable with decorative and sentimental composition ("The Assemblage of "Woman"" 174). Similarly, regarding Ghatak's reconstruction of Indian myths, Geeta Kapur sees the archetypes carrying expressions of the "type" within a class, without subscribing to the sacred or the revelatory as such. These archetypes, according to Kapur, are hybrid, as they do not advocate any proof of rationality or secularity, and in fact, flourish within a melodramatic genre and retain a status of doubt (ibid. 193). Shahani suggests that Ghatak's conceptualization of the feminine essence roots back to the pre-Brahmanical, agrarian roots. Ghatak himself proclaims that the "Great Mother archetype"²³⁴ or the "mother complex" employed in his films has "no relation to religion" but need to be identified in terms of "the basic

²³³ In Bharat's *Natya Shastra*, the *bibhatsa rasa* is akin to an odious sentiment and its *Sthayi bhava* (stable determinant emotion) is *jugupta* or disgust. It arises from perceiving the undesirable, the defective and the abnormal, through one's senses of smell, touch and sound.

²³⁴ Throughout Ghatak's films, women are coloured in the archetypes of *Uma*, *Durga* and *Jagaddhatri* (as in case of Nita) and *Sita* and *Radha* (as in Sita). Tithi Bhattacharya explains the import of *Durga Puja* celebrations and the archetype of the Divine Mother among Bengalis: "Durga also combines in herself the attractive duality of a familial imagery along with political agency. She is both the ideal daughter/mother and the valiant slayer of demons. Thus, she is "good" in the small sense of the domestic; as well as good in the more cosmic sense of the eternal struggle between the good and the evil" (924). According to Spivak, *Durga* or the "great goddess" spawns out of male imaginary and has a distant fixed visibility, whereas the local smaller goddesses are the "invaginated *dvaita* episteme" who are "part-containing-the-whole," and who "create a space of theater for the women who sustain rural society." Thus, unlike the *bratas* (domestic rituals for women without priestly interventions), in the great goddess' festivals, women are gatherers of ritual details rather than the human protagonists ("Moving Devi" 139).

primordial force” (ibid. 187). In his own words, his recurrent viewing of the heroines as Mother Bengal echoes the following: “The idea of this great Mother image...with both its benevolent and terrible aspects has been in our civilization since antiquity...The Great Mother image in its duality exists in every fibre of our being” (Ghatak 72, quoted in Shah 131).²³⁵

Drawing on Joseph Campell and Jung’s philosophical and psychological perceptions, as well as Erich Neumann, Heinrich Zimmer and Ananda Coomaraswamy’s scholarship (O’Donnell ibid. 187), Ghatak engages with archetypes because they are the “deepest feelings of man” and “spontaneous human reactions” as well as “constituents of the social collective unconscious” (Bhaskar Sarkar 316). Ghatak states that the Jungian unconscious²³⁶ and the Marxian theory are “thoroughly complementary,” yet they have “no inherent contradiction” because “the collective consciousness has a deep influence on the unconscious behavior of the people and the entire class structure determines the conscious behavior of the people” (O’Donnell ibid.). His construction and deconstruction of Nita and Sita’s characters are apparently intended to project “fallible goddesses and commodified women,” who both “contest

²³⁵ By the same token, Priyanka Shah argues that, even though his films are pivoted on visual iconizations that archetypically look at the women as “cultural spaces,” such visualizations are not collaborative with the nationalistic perspective: “...This image of the “Mother Goddess” was highly romanticized during the days of anti-colonial nationalism when it came to symbolize the Motherland, race, language, nation, etc: hence, the idea of Bharat-Mata. However, Ghatak’s use of the discourse deviates radically from the nationalistic use: the images invest the narratives with an allegorical charge *where the story of the Mother becomes the story of the Land*” (Shah 133, emphasis mine). O’Donnell too reads Ghatak’s vision as undermining the “dream” of the utopian Mother as embodied in Nation, by combining it with Marxist-inspired meanings “of the oppressiveness of misdirected class aspirations” (O’Donnell, “The Assemblage of “Woman”” 184).

²³⁶ Jung defines “collective unconscious” or “objective psyche” as “...everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind; everything which, involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want and do; all the future things that are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness: all this is the content of the unconscious” (O’Donnell 185). In Luke Hockley’s words: “this unconscious core is the repository for the psychological experience of mankind and that it also contains the plan or pattern for psychological development” (*Cinematic Projections*, quoted in O’Donnell 186).

and exemplify the destructiveness of capital...in post-Independence Bengal” (O’Donnell *ibid.*

181). Bhaskar Sarkar reflects:

Through his insistence on the social nature of human existence, Ghatak was able to carve out an alternative cultural space outside this hegemonic project, from where he could launch his attacks on Indian modernity and nationhood (313).

According to Sarkar, Ghatak used archetypes to criticize the meta-nationalist cultural project “that promised to deliver a coherent modern subject as a true representative of the nation” (*ibid.*). Ghatak claims to shift his perspective from the nationalist desire that has been growing pervasively around the notion of “ma,” by focusing on the socio-economic callousness of the new nation-state (O’Donnell 178). In this assemblage of the “site of woman,” he refers to a wide existing repertoire – from Brechtian epic theatrical approach, Stalinavski’s acting technique, Eisenstein’s theory of montage, to Nino Rota and Bengali folk and classical traditions. Thomas Stubblefield detects a parallel between the Brechtian technique of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) and Ghatak’s effort at destabilizing and dramatizing the desire for stability viz-a-viz the reality of nomadship. Stubblefield goes to the extent of stating that in using the unreality of sound, which serves to de-center and displace rather than supplement image as in Hollywood, Ghatak undercuts the illusionistic quality of image, forcing the viewers to reassess cultural attitudes instead of passively mourning.

Thus, for all the above critics, Ghatak’s act of deconstructing tradition followed by “insertion of reconstructed representations into a modern context” is a way of questioning the nation-state and proposing unfulfilled cultural union through melodramatic configurations of “woman,” “home” and “family” (O’Donnell 177). The critics perceive his films in the features of epic, which, by inverting and recontextualizing Indian myths, “make them relevant as

assessments of the contemporary historical context” (ibid. 175). According to them, his deterritorializing effect is meant to break the audience’s identification in favour of a meta-level signification.

My reading, however, sees the archetypes in Ghatak’s work as striking a naïve familiarity with the Bengali Hindu refugee identity, rather than aiding fruitful experimentation. While reassessing Bengal’s cultural memory, identity and history, Ghatak chalks out a line of experience restricted to Bengali Hindu middle-class ethos. He takes up an alternative East Bengali nation-building enterprise, in which he sets out the refugee women in traditionalist archetypal images, by presenting them as roots of “surrogate” familial units of the urban, lower middle-class immigrants.²³⁷ In describing Ghatak’s IPTA-inspired “nation-building energies” in *Komal Gandhar*, Partha Chatterjee concludes that the film exalts “an organization of idealists who had a purity of purpose and dreamt of building a contented, egalitarian India” (quoted in Mandal 71). What Chatterjee may have overlooked is that Ghatak’s nation-building follows the strategy of creating a fixed stasis in representation, and is achieved by dwelling on the plight of the Hindu refugee *bhadramahila*. In this context, it is relevant to refer to O’Donnell’s explanation about how home and the value-loaded figure of the domestic female combines to heighten the impact of melodrama:

In cinema, the family, the home, with women – mothers, wives, daughters and sisters as the key players – is the primary site of domestic melodrama. In Bengali culture, the home houses the heart of Bengali society: the family. And at the core of the Bengali family is *ma*, the mother (““Woman” and “Homeland”” 32).

Through utopian and dystopian visions of “Homeland,” Ghatak draws an analogy between Bengali women’s symbolic images of joy, sorrow and nostalgia, and the birth of the Indian

²³⁷ Such an unconventional concept of alternate family is shown through the theatre troupe in *Komal Gandhar*, where the protagonists are not blood-related but tied by the unity of their Cause, which aims to thwart the idea of a well-ensconced Bengali extended family.

nation-state. Additionally, Priyanka Shah reads Ghatak as often portraying his women characters through un-heroic everyday household struggles, in which there is a reification of the feminine: "...Ghatak's 'heroines' do belong to the traditional space relegated to them by the authoritarian Bengali middle-class intelligentsia" (134).

I also agree with O'Donnell that connecting of affect and archetype has a political end in Ghatak's films. Sarkar's opinion that Ghatak never otherizes the Muslim components of Bengal does not sit well with Ghatak's own obsession with the idealized (refugee) Bengali feminine beauty, which he sees as the concentrate of the pure (East) Bengali landscape.²³⁸ Such a "beauty" is steeped in Hinduist feelings. As he shapes Anasuya's image in *Komal Gandhar* in a red-bordered white sari, a big red dot on her forehead and the end of the *sari* around her head, he encumbers the female protagonist with a pregnant meaning of Hinduized Bengali nationhood. Anasua is the quintessence of Bengal's topography, which is symbolized as the ruing *Hindu* Bengali mother, daughter and sister – basically taking after the same Grand National theory that Ghatak tends to cut off from or denounce. It brings back the doubt about the particular quality of a "past unified Bengal" that he unconsciously mourns in his reminiscence. His repetitive depiction of the refugee females, firstly as goddess-like and in the end as petty and powerless, who are ultimately tossed away by the utilitarian and predatory patriarchal machinery, do not merely criticize the Bengali society's post-Partition decadence.²³⁹ In the finale of *Meghe Dhaka*

²³⁸ He depicts this quintessence as: "A girl, a very ordinary girl, tired after her day's work, waits near my house at the bus or tram stop, a lot of papers and a bag in her hand. Her hair forms a halo around her head and face, some clinging to her face because of perspiration. I discover a history from the subtle lines of pain on her face. My imagination reaches out to the most ordinary, yet unforgettable drama in her strong, firm and determined, yet soft, touching and infinitely patient life" (Interview to *Chitrapat*).

²³⁹ Ghatak's turning his female characters into passive spectacles, by frontally presenting them through close-up or mid-shots, and placing them within culturally familiar poises in flashes of evocative moments, provokes the question whether he unwittingly falls into the trap of the conventionally gendered patterns of representations, and if his spectator-positioning is pruriently male (Anindya Sengupta 4-5).

Tara, for instance, the camera pans in a dizzy way, capturing the wide-ranging view of the surrounding hills of Bengal, in front of which Nita's relentless pleading for life falls too insignificant. It is foretold that she shall henceforth spend her remaining days in a "claustrophobic confinement" (O'Donnell). The same trapped feeling, amplified by the sharp breathing sound and petrified face of Sita in *Subarnarekha*, diminishes and even disembodies her earlier godly stature through a powerful visual and aural montage. The in-focus shot of the women's face followed by their hushed disappearance render them the similar lack of agency as the helpless Bengal divided under communal spat.

Regarding the usage of myths, Shahani states that myth, when applied in the practice of history, has to become the instance of many metonymies that it suggests. It should neither be concrete nor represent "the whole," but the different parts that it contains should have juxtaposing, superposing and opposing relations to each other ("Film as a Contemporary Art" 36). In *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Durga*'s symbol, as Shahani observes, is fragmented, instead of being propitiated with human sacrifice. Rather than the idol's *visarjan* (immersion) in the waters to be recreated, *Durga* as applied to Nita's image, is consumed by the fires of industrial disease (ibid.). To oppose Shahani's view, Nita as a modern rendition of *Durga* and a memorial allusion to Bengali refugee woman, is not constructed to remain merely a part of the whole refugee experience; she becomes "The Refugee Experience" instead. Through the depiction of her suffering, a meta-refugee woman's romanticized image surfaces, which obscures the possible negative anthropomorphic traits like greed, jealousy and selfish drives, as if representing all refugee women in the light of Nita's flawlessness. Such stereotypical understanding of Nita is further sustained through scholarly approbation, such as made by Somdatta Mandal:

In fact, Neeta has become the deathless symbol of Partition itself and the uprooted woman's struggle against it. After fulfilling her mission, when she at last

succumbs to tuberculosis, her piercing cry, 'I want to live,' *sums up the essence of all displacements exodus and partitions* (70, emphasis mine).

In Nita, Mandal sees the incarnation of the “new woman...who worked shoulder to shoulder with the men in order to earn her daily bread” (70). After her death, the model of “Nita” continues *only* in the symptomatic icon of those refugee women who became struggling bread-earners, who did not even have the smallest means to mend their torn slippers or buy a new one. As the film opens with Nita faltering in her damaged sandals and also ends with another anonymous refugee woman, who takes the deceased Nita’s place and similarly struggles to walk to her workplace in broken shoes, the cycle becomes complete. Mandal interprets this filmic symbol as standing for “...thousands of such Neetas [who] changed the socio-cultural pattern of middle-class Bengali life from the 1950s onwards” (70). Despite trying to become the necessary essence, this symbology definitely cannot speak for all. To elaborate more, both Gita in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and Sita in *Subarnarekha* can sing well. But the myth of Mira and Radha will never be brought in to describe Gita, as they will in the case of Sita. This is because Gita parodies and upturns the myth, and therefore as a refugee woman, is far from the vision of the ideal. While Sita sings in her longing for Abhiram her childhood love, Gita sings to seduce away her sister’s lover Sanat. Gita’s impossibility to be nominated as “The Refugee Woman” in the popular consciousness is also a commentary about the limitation of the Indian myths and archetypes, which do not have in their repository an exemplar of vocally talented yet villainously seductive goddess. Rather, the Indian (Brahminical) goddesses’ powers are limited by the sheer moralities that determine them. Shahani can also be challenged by remembering that Ghatak’s brainchild Nita does not evoke the powerful and the formidable warrior-goddess *Durga*,²⁴⁰ but one of her

²⁴⁰ According to the *Shiva Purana* and the *Devi Mahatmyah*, *Durga*, also meaning “the invincible,” is born out of the combined powerful rays emitted from the mouth of *Vishnu* and the faces of other male deities. She can be

more lenient manifestations. From the beginning, Ghatak puts Nita, the unmarried daughter, in the image of *Jagaddhatri* (literally meaning “One who bears the Earth”), who is not the harsh and untamable symbology of *Shakti* (power) but the epitome of a domesticated ideology of Motherhood.²⁴¹ So what Shahani assumes as a recontextualization and subversive treatment of the given myth is absent here. Ghatak’s premeditated comparison of Nita with the asexual and placid Mother presumes qualities of forbearance and compassion, which are not the same as the immense seditious possibilities of primitive “Great Mother.” Nita is hence not an antithesis but clearly a continuation and replication of the male-dominated Brahminical myth.

What Ghatak remembers as his “Rural Bengal” of boyhood, is “...revelling in [its] fairy tales, *panchalis*, and [its] thirteen festivals in twelve months....” (Trina Nileena Banerjee n.p.) As *Komal Gandhar*’s heroine Anasua states, the loss of this “Rural Bengal” milieu amounts to the loss of *nischindi*. Banerjee explains the word *nischindi* as “an almost prelapsarian peace and contentment that comes of unruptured belonging” (n.p.). She states that in *Subarnarekha*, Ishwar’s tragic error begins with his coming out of the Natun Jiban Colony and desiring for *nischindi* in a reconstructed home. She, however, does not elaborate what the nature of this

seen as the Supreme Divine Woman, formed of the superlative qualities of the Male Principle, who, however, has a greater potential than all these powers combined together. Bearing ten hands and carrying the weapons of the male deities, her image shows *Mahishasura* – the symbol of an Inferior Male, lying vanquished at her feet.

²⁴¹ According to Ramakrishna the renowned *tantric* and worshipper of *Kali*, if *Jagaddhatri* would not hold the world, it might fall down. Her other name *Adharabhuta* (The Bearer of the World) also refers to this connotation. The phrases of *Jagaddhatri*’s hymn: “*Jayade Jagadanande Jayadekaprapujite*” means she is the concentrate of the world’s joy and victory. Even though the image of *Jagaddhatri* traditionally holds the *Karindrasura* or the Elephant Demon at her feet, her physical posture, unlike *Durga*, is not aggressive. It is usually her *vahana* the lion, who is in a state of overpowering the demon. Moreover, according to Ramakrishna, defeating *Karindrasura* is the symbol of controlling “the frantic elephant called mind.” A *Pauranik* lore has it that worshipping *Jagaddhatri* leads to losing one’s ego. From these explanations, the image of this particular manifestation of *Devi* appears as the Mother Protector, who also bestows qualities of restraint and selflessness – a victory of the social conscious over the intrinsic unconscious – all that fundamentally make up Nita’s character. Nita also resembles *Sati*, the “pleasureless mother” who “punishes herself for pleasuring others.” Such characteristics denaturalize the *dvaita* manifestation of the *Devi* through her *ārohana* or ascent (Spivak, “Moving *Devi*” 133).

nischindi is and why it is wrong to look for it outside the colony life. In the film, just as in reality, colony life is dominated by the *bhadralok* refugees, whereas outside the power structure of colony, the Dalit boy Abhiram has the license to turn into an intellectual, and even seek to marry *bhadralok* Ishwar's sister Sita. Moreover, outside the colony life, the East Bengali Self seems to be threatened by the "corrupting" influence of Marwari business-class populace. Hence, the *nischindi* that could be only found in East Bengal villages and afterwards in the refugee colonies of West Bengal, and which was destroyed outside these settings, is characterized by a homogeneous identity and class-caste status-quo, and its true color is *bhadralok* Bengali Hindu-ness. Such a *nischindi* therefore dwells on hierarchy and nourishes a sentiment of parochialism.²⁴²

There is a tendency by Ghatak to build on the same structure of feelings of the middle-class *bhadralok* audience that he aims to snub in his films. He is far from challenging the romantic, the sentimental, the nostalgic and the archetypal.²⁴³ His strategy is close to the program of *Jugendstil* (German) as described by Adorno: "By choosing objects presumably cleansed of subjective meaning, these films infuse the object with *exactly that meaning which they are trying to resist*" ("Transparencies on Film" 182, emphasis mine). Putting together every ingredient that touches the core of the collective *bhadralok* cultural memory, Ghatak's *Meghe Dhaka Tara*

²⁴² Whereas both of Ghatak's films, *Subarnarekha* and *Bari Theke Paliye*, focus on the protagonists' leaving Calcutta to return "home," albeit with changed perceptions, in *Parash Pathar*, Ray's opening sequence shows a man's miniscule figure from above, trying to cross a busy street in a big city. As this individual figure eventually acquires prominence before the camera, it implies an endlessness of seemingly absurd possibilities within Calcutta (Malini Bhattacharya 1009).

²⁴³ Sarkar points out to the problematic side of Ghatak's representation: "He tries to resolve this tension between the social and the personal through the invocation of fundamental commonalities that transcend spatial and temporal differences: if the subjective realm consists of elements shared by all humans and represented by similar symbolologies, then it turns out to be socially determined" (317). This difficulty can be very well connected to the specific religious overtone colouring Ghatak's projection of archetypes, whose recurrent usage tend to heighten the probability of a specific cultural-political strategy.

draws its feat, not so much by criticizing the popular tropes, as because of containing them. Together these tropes resonate with the prized intellectual assets of the Bengalis, which, when placed against Partition, commands an overwhelming and catchy emotional excess. His filmic technique is also based on the principle of shock, and borders on Adorno's definition of pseudo-revolutionary films. Referring to *Anything Goes* from the 1930s, Adorno defines the traits of pseudo-revolutionary films as propagating a formal movement beneath the external veneer of indeterminacy. Such "liberated" films vie with the *a priori* collectivity "from the mechanisms of unconscious and irrational influence and enlist this collectivity in the service of emancipatory intentions" ("Transparencies" 184). In the following section on "culture industry," I discuss how Adorno's explanation can be applied to understand Ghatak's desire of boiling down an entire cultural pool into the Communist movement.

Besides myth, the function of music is also imperative in Ghatak's films. Ranging from Tagore's songs to *baul* and Federico Fellini, the montages and sound effects create a dialogue between individual and nature ("The Assemblage of "Woman"" 211). According to most of the abovementioned critics, Ghatak's recurrent applications of *baul*²⁴⁴ songs are meant to focus on the lower-middle-class and the grassroots. In the particular *baul* song in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* that indicates Nita's impasse, by alluding to a forlorn boat without a boatman, material anxieties expose the spiritual crises of Nita's lower middle-class family. In *Subarnarekha*, where the *baul* takes on a poetic serenity amid the chaotic Natun Jiban colony life, the audience is almost made to believe that Ghatak's camera incorporates even those who do not belong to the *bhadra* Hindu

²⁴⁴ Dalrymple understands Baul as: "Mixing elements of Sufism, Tantra, Vaishnavism and Buddhism, they revere the Gods and visit temples, mosques and wayside shrines, but only as a road of enlightenment, never as end in itself. The goal is to discover the 'Man of the Heart' – Moner Manush – the ideal that lives within every man, but that may take a lifetime to discover" (quoted in O'Donnell, "The Assemblage of "Woman"" 205).

refugee fold. According to Priyanka Shah, Ghatak's film *Jukti, Tokko aar Goppo* (1974) forms the apotheosis, which tends to chart "a shift to the marginalized domain of the *Santhals*, the subalterns whose culture and specific historicity has bypassed the politico-cultural ethics of the self-conscious middle-class Bengalis..." (132). Revealing how the vision for a "classless society" had actually set apart a group of people in terms of highbrow practices, *Jukti, Tokko aar Goppo* pits the ideologies, cultural dilemmas and socio-political beliefs against one another, and inverts them (132).

Notwithstanding Ghatak's incorporating the hitherto disregarded non-Hindu non-*bhadralok* parallel communities in some minor parts of his films, they never feature as the protagonists. Besides, the non-*bhadra* characters exclusively promote phallocentric bondings. For example, the *baul* and the ferryman's songs, which invoke marginal practices, are conspicuously lacking the female figure.²⁴⁵ Women have customary ties with the spirit of domesticity, be they as cruel apathetic mothers or as housewives turned into prostitutes, as coquettes or as bread-earning nourishers, and their range of actions can be simplistically divided up according to the primordial compartments of Hindu womanhood. Because it is the abstract idea of a Hindu Bengali motherland that Ghatak ruminates, his imagination fails to account for the Dalit refugee men and women, or the Muslim subalterns. He construes the Partition of Bengal entirely as an East Bengali upper-caste middle- or lower middle-class Hindu affair.²⁴⁶ In

²⁴⁵ Even though the concerted outcry of "Dohai Ali" in *Komal Gandhar* includes both male and female voices, it is indicative of a tradition of routine prayer made by Muslim boatmen to supplicate God's blessings against natural disasters. Its poignancy in *Komal Gandhar* is meant to decry the status-quo caused by the social crack-up due to Partition. As the editors put it: "On the 'Indian' side of the Padma, railtracks end. The country, a culture, humanity is severed there, brutally, foolishly. A slowly accelerating track shot gets momentum with a high pitched "Dohai Ali" chorus...and cuts to pitch black screen abruptly for two seconds. Consciousness is severed. We are shocked" (*"Komal Gandhar: A Maverick's Dream"*).

²⁴⁶ The Heideggerian term traumatic *Dasein* that LaCapra uses, which refers to "anxiously reliving in its immediacy something that was a shattering experience for which one was not prepared – for which one did not have, in

apotheosizing and demonizing the females in terms of Hindu Brahminical justifications, and through the soundtracks of folklorish wedding songs that remind of the traditional practice of *Gauri daan* (child-bride's home-leaving ceremony in Hindu marriage), Ghatak is assuming a shared knowledge that roots back to mainstream Hindu Bengali culture. The absence of the Dalit or the Muslim Bengali spirit is tantamount to excluding these audiences from his cinematic project.

Baul songs apart, it is curious how Ghatak's "radical" cinemas justify using Tagorean songs, whereas the entire Tagorean "school of thought" has time and again faced criticism for its aristocratic, bourgeois and patriarchal ideas.²⁴⁷ There is a populist perception that Ghatak appropriates the Tagorean songs from their allegedly patrician foundation, and re-positions them as signifiers of a unified humble Bengali cultural life. Conversely, I read his appropriation as a means of manipulating the "bygone" Tagorean era with the much urgent context of politics. His films' musical-cultural ambience has a dogmatic ambition similar to the misused values of Communism under Soviet invasion. Post-1948, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, corroborating with Stalin's "Socialist content in national form," had started to espouse folk art with open-arms, turning even a traditional marriage into an emblem of popular art. Being in search of a "genuine culture" (Greenberg 10), the universal (and originally urban) culture of

Freud's term, *Angstbereitschaft* (the readiness to feel anxiety)" (LaCapra 89-90), can be applied to the temporal stagnation and relentless retrospection in Ghatak's narratives. There is "an exclusive...fixation on unrepresentable excess," and hence a withdrawal from what can be restored of the "traumatizing limit events" (92). Such an excess in his films lead to what LaCapra calls a conversion of the traumatic into sublime and "transvaluing it and making it the basis for an elevating, supraethical, even elated or quasi-transcendental test of the self or the group" (93).

²⁴⁷ According to Geeta Kapur, as landed gentry from the nineteenth century, pastoral nostalgia is part of the Tagore family. Their romantic viewpoint would combine noble learning with experimental dilettantism, within the framework of the Indian renaissance. While folk art would also be incorporated, the entire project is seen as highly pedagogic (Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice" 52).

communist kitsch would engulf the folk culture, allowing no creative conception to thrive in isolation from “The Movement.”²⁴⁸

Ghatak, Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) and Kitsch

As Ghatak mentions in the chapter “My Coming into Films,” he had abandoned his initial writing career because he found literature to be a slow and inadequate medium that attracted a very small readership. The fame of Bijan Bhattacharya’s *Nabanna* drew him to the powerful medium of dramatic literature. Subsequently, he started writing, directing and acting in plays, in the process becoming an active member of the IPTA (19). Although Ghatak had to leave the IPTA with the label of a “Trotskyite” (Shah 124), the thesis that he submits to the Communist Party of India posits his complex position with respect to the cultural kitsch that his contemporary comrades widely practiced in art. The theatre group shown in *Komal Gandhar*, which is inspired by Ghatak’s own experience of working in IPTA: “...both mirrors and rejects a network of dominant political relationships always figured in *familial* terms” (Trina Nileena Banerjee n.p.). He perceives a cultural kitsch in theatre in the habits of unproductive, stock imitations of art work, philistine attitude towards art and culture, and overt utilitarian approach towards and political usurpation of artists by the communist party.²⁴⁹ According to him, the Party

²⁴⁸ In *the Joke*, Ludvik describes the most hideous passing of the Rides of Kings in Brno. With drinks, a volatile mob and the actual king missing from the procession (“all I could see was actors, and on their faces masks pulled on to represent cretinous masculinity, arrogant ruthlessness and brutishness”: Ludvik 293), the scene is like an apparition haunted by the absence of its own body. The kitsch that Dorfles describes as “being vulgarly reproduced and known not for their real value but for a sentimental or technical substitute of these values” (19) is precisely the situation of Rides of Kings in the modern-day. Fattening itself on the corpse of a fully matured tradition, it signals an esoteric code no one has the patience to understand. As Ludvik says: “For many centuries young men have been riding forth in Moravian villages . . . with strange messages whose writ in some unknown language they pronounce with a moving loyalty and a lack of comprehension” (274).

²⁴⁹ Following the banning of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in 1948, the vital strength of the IPTA was sapped. By the time CPI became a legal party again, and participated in the First General Election, IPTA had been corroded with the departure of several intellectuals to form independent parties, such as Bohurupee, Little Theatre Group, etc. Misperceptions within CPI, such as recorded in Ajoy Ghose’s statement: “Whatever is not reactionary is progressive,” indicates IPTA’s degeneration. Moreover, the 1962 Indo-China War raised nation-wide chauvinistic

would treat the Cultural Front as a “money-earning machine” and “a mobilizer of meetings to keep the crowd (and not masses)²⁵⁰ engaged with whatever the artists can offer” (“On the Cultural Front” n.p.). It is, however, another question, if he himself is completely extricated from the problems, which he identifies as inhibitive towards full realization of the party’s cultural potential. For instance, while he condemns the party’s interest in “taking things from Culture” without caring to connect the cultural roots to the common people, he himself urges selective arrogation of forms, techniques and philosophic content from bourgeois cultural products. In his words:

We know that just to express all that we hold dear and to present that expression to the masses, with quality, is our task as Communists. We also know that the moment we start to do this, the other side [Bourgeois culture] becomes immediately important, because we may lose balance and defeat our own purpose by becoming isolated... We must proceed by admitting that in relation to Bourgeois culture we are, indeed, in a very bad taste. Then we have to *reshape* that culture *to achieve our goals, and to harness it to our purpose* (“On the Cultural Front” n.p., emphasis mine).

Additionally, in this cultural-political revolution, he reckons a vital role for the non-Party sympathizers or “Amateurs,” who are not entirely aligned with the core Communist Cause. He describes them as “available human materials...the breeding ground, the fountainhead, the source of new cadres,” who need to be positioned “in the most effective manner possible,” which betray his shallow intention of publicizing communist doctrines, rather than serving the cause of

emotions, leading to a significant section among IPTA enthusiasts to break away and support anti-communist propaganda. The split with the IPTA involved clash between two prominent ideologies, arguing whether technical perfection and skill were more important or the popular demand. The first group, led by figures like Sambhu Mitra and Bijon Bhattacharjee, stressed on the “form” and demanded absolute freedom in developing their talent, thereby rejecting the party’s deterministic control on art; the second, steered by comrades like Sudhi Pradhan, emphasized on spreading a mass cultural movement through art and literature, and developing art through live contact with the people. To the latter group, form was a bourgeoisie concern and ought to be rendered a secondary position (Khan et al. 116). In the absence of either of these two aspects, however, a lapse started to show in the revolutionary works of art. For more, see “Left Cultural Movement in West Bengal: An Analysis.”

²⁵⁰ By following Mary Parker Follett’s definition of crowd as “an undifferentiated mass” (87), it can be surmised that by “masses,” Ghatak is implying certain distinguished qualities that a crowd lacks.

literature and aesthetics. By an affected sentiment, which is kitschy, and has precise political goals to meet, Ghatak reduces the vast potential of creative arts into a medium for realization of “The Revolution.” Tagorean poetics, the rich collection of Indian classical music, the folklore traditions and the archetypes, are all punched together and made to lose their immeasurable significations, in the process of pandering to the communist mission. I find this meta-language and meta-practice that shapes a people’s responding quality to be similar to Milan Kundera’s explanation of the Leftist actor in Soviet invasion: “...What makes a leftist a leftist is not this or that theory but his ability to integrate any theory into the kitsch called the Grand March” (*Unbearable Lightness* 256-57). Even while encouraging an “Amateur” artist to individually cultivate his own art, Ghatak emphasizes the highest importance of “theory” in the Academy, such that through a marked stress on “pattern,” “we can inculcate Marxist thought in a much more interesting manner than is otherwise possible” (n.p.).²⁵¹ In Ghatak’s apparently unorthodox attitude, where even an amateur’s shifted perspective finds its place in “The Movement,” everything is imperilled to become an extension of “The Movement,” with the desire of manipulating and collapsing the non-revolutionary within the *a priori* category of “The Revolutionary.” He contains both the problem and its antidote, with his one view undercutting the other. In the same tone, he says: “There is no such occupation as an Art-organizer; it is a monstrous tautology... This is not a mass-organization where problems are of a general nature. This way of thinking is shallow and a dangerously wrong approach to organization building” (n.p.). Then again, on discussing ways for the Democratic Front to succeed, he states:

²⁵¹ This again echoes Kundera’s thinking: “The identity of kitsch comes not from a political strategy but from images, metaphors, and vocabulary. It is therefore possible to break the habit and march against the interests of a Communist country. What is impossible, however, is to substitute one word for others” (*Unbearable* 261).

“...Continually, systematically, thoroughly watch and account and *control* on all levels; these are the *weapons* to be used” (n.p., emphasis mine).

Ghatak and the Culture Industry

Ghatak understood Partition solely as a Congressite bourgeois outcome, which could pool middle-class support only by misguiding them (O'Donnell 185). In spite of admitting that the narrow class values and desires of the middle-class had resulted in this misfortune, and calling Partition as a “joint treachery committed by the colonial power and the nationalist leadership” (Biswas, “Her Mother’s Son” n.p.), never for once does he clarify that many amongst the immigrant Bengalis were, in fact, the key enactors of this historical decision. He states, “Many *like me* were uprooted when *they* partitioned Bengal for *their own benefits*” (Dasgupta et al 33, quoted in Harrington 4, emphasis mine). As his bitterness is apparent towards the government and the host society, he, like most immigrant creative artists, makes a simplistic divide of “innocent victim refugees,” as if it were a collective sign, with every possible Other.²⁵² He generalizes all West Bengalis as an elite class in opposition to the “simple folks” from East Bengal.²⁵³ An impartial representation would instead have marked off the *bhadralok* from the huge non-*bhadralok* population, as the latter were the greater sufferers of Partition. While artists

²⁵² In doing so, Ghatak’s position is similar to Lipsitz, who: “By making marginality and authenticity virtually coterminous...often lapses into a well-intentioned essentialism, in which the “aggrieved populations” by necessity enjoy a more authentic consciousness” (Collins 834). In Chantal Mouffe’s words: “the problem is with the very idea of the unitary subject... [W]e are in fact always multiple and contradictory subjects, inhabitants of a diversity of communities...constructed by a variety of discourses and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject-positions” (837).

²⁵³ Shah discusses how these immigrants were bullied by the native West Bengalis, accused of polluting the land and “looked down upon as an uneducated bunch of villagers by the sophisticated and ‘educated’ *babus*” (123). Ghatak’s assumption that the barrier separating the “women” and the “common man” with the “intelligentsia” will never dissolve away, where the former is always posited in a peripheral position, can as well be taken as his allusion to the eternal homelessness and wandering status of the Bengali Refugee compared to the long-term well-heeled position of the natives. He would often apply the metaphor of the itinerant IPTA performers “with nothing to fix them to the safety of bourgeois ideals of home and property” to the stock figure of the immigrant, who, according to Ghatak, “travels all over Bengal in search of a home” (124).

like Ghatak continually highlight only the predicament of the displaced masses, many among whom were in fact genuinely innocent and victims, they neglect a similar set of native grassroots Bengalis, who did not want or influence the Partition in any way, but suffered from increasing joblessness and otherwise more difficult standards of living in a post-Partition West Bengal. A conscious East Bengali sub-nationalism roots itself in West Bengal through these cultural oeuvres, by rendering a very limited and narcissistic definition of victimization, and flippantly ruling out all those casualties occurring in the wake of Partition, which would not serve the master commemorative project.

While Priyanka Shah supports Ghatak's views about the East Bengali refugees' sufferings in West Bengal, she also questions the possible typecasting in Ghatak's films. She observes:

East Pakistan has been portrayed in Ghatak's films as an idyllic place breeding prelapsarian innocence and purity. On the other hand, Calcutta has been time and again portrayed as a dumping ground of debris. Calcutta to Ghatak, is a place which he loved to hate and hated to love. If East Pakistan is portrayed in the shadow of the Emile Bronte's Yorkshire moors, vibrant and innocent, then Calcutta resembles Dickens' London, a dark world of apocalyptic stupor (126).

To this effect, she questions the validity of Ghatak's puritan convictions, as he deprecates the Calcuttan urban setting and projects it against an amiable picture of Bangladesh (135).²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Adorno notes: "No homeland can survive being processed by the films which celebrate it, and which thereby turn the unique character on which it thrives into an interchangeable sameness" (Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" 103). There could not have been the almost-surreal ideological entity of the folklorish, pristine East Bengal, without a blown up pejorative image of the Calcuttan metropolis. The two opposite categories – of the extremely dark picture of Calcutta and the buoyant vision of the Golden East Bengal village – are equally non-existing exaggerated states of mind, which do not resemble real geographical locations. To deconstruct the "aura" of the pre-Partition Calcutta consequently required the creation of an alternate "aura," a utopic sensibility, which, as Asad-ul Iqbal Latif discovers, is the key to a refugee mind's foregrounding a sense of Self. As Latif states that "there is no way to imagine Bengal without recognizing and respecting the refugee as its first citizen" (43), what is discounted is the immense palimpsestic and liberal possibilities within the otherwise much-criticized social texture of Calcutta, which could enable materialization of innumerable radical claims. One must not, after all, forget that the room for accommodating Ghatak's criticism about Calcutta as well as his much-professed avant-garde views was, first of all, the geo-cultural setting of Calcutta itself, albeit after a lot of socio-political frictions and

Edward Said's description of exiles is also useful in understanding Ghatak's standpoint:

...Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong... Willfulness, exaggeration, overstatement: these are characteristic styles of being an exile, methods for compelling the world to accept your vision – which you make more unacceptable because you are in fact unwilling to have it accepted (Said 182).

Moreover, in Megan Carrigy's study, Ghatak links "the refugee experience – the experience of exile – to folk and epic forms which together expand into an investigation of film form. They are the key elements of Ghatak's originality in the cinema – *a potent mix*" (n.p., emphasis mine).²⁵⁵

According to Carrigy, Ghatak recognizes and embodies "*the truth* of his experience of Partition in the cinema, forge[d] connections that were *profoundly true to the experience of Indian*

people..." (Emphasis mine). *The Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* describes his film *Ajantrik* as

"a new investigation into film form, *expanding the refugee experience in a universalized*

leitmotiv of cultural dismemberment and exile evoking an epic tradition drawing on tribal, folk

and classical forms (Buddhist sculpture, Baul music, the *khayal*)" (Carrigy n.p.). These

observations reveal certain attitudes on Ghatak's part – of isolating himself in order to maintain

distinctiveness, of cogently mixing genres with the aim of heightening the impact of refugee

affliction in cinema, and of universalizing a particular meaning of "Refugee Experience" – which

dangerously border on Adorno's concept of "culture industry." Especially in the way Ghatak

blends the old with the new, there is a very deterministic tailoring and manufacturing of the

discouragements. The prodigious vessel for absorbing Ghatak's so-called "modern" perspectives, which nonetheless, were deeply entangled in gendered, Hinduized and *bhadralok* inhibitions, was the motley culture of the urbane Calcutta, even though it was also the first to pass under his cinematic sword.

²⁵⁵ Comparing Ghatak to his protagonist Bimal, the taxi driver in *Ajantrik*, Carrigy notes: "...Like Bimal, [Ghatak] resisted the fashions of his day to respond in a certain way to his means of livelihood. The parallel between Ghatak and Bimal, then, lies not in their relationship to the machine age but rather to *a sense of being isolated by a personal vision that goes against the grain*. Further, both refugees of Partition, their sense of being out of place is *magnified* as individuals whose vision of the world differs strongly to many of those surrounding them" (Carrigy n.p., emphasis mine).

nature of the end-product, for consumption by the masses. His criticizing refugee women's exploitation without suggesting a solution to the *bhadralok*-sponsored hypocritical gendered relations, can be explained through Geeta Kapur's observation about the "self-conscious intelligentsia." Such intelligentsia, as Kapur states, holds at bay the inhibiting, camouflaging and liberating aspects of modernism, posing "the issues of their own identity even when they cannot so easily resolve problematic that fetters the process of their own liberation" ("Contemporary Cultural Practice" 53). By repeatedly staging the dilemma without offering a possible way out, Ghatak politically arrogates and dramatizes the theme of Partition, and capitalizes it for instilling a particular kind of social insight among the post-Partition Bengali middle-class audience. Like Adorno's notion of culture industry, such appropriation cannot survive without adapting to and using the masses as its ideology:

The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable. How this mentality can be changed is excluded throughout ("Culture Industry Reconsidered" 99).

Ghatak's judging Ray as "painstakingly trying to build up a realistic space-time" is identical to the culture industry's accusing its critics as "snobs" and "taking refuge in esoterica" (102).²⁵⁶ As Ghatak connects Ray's so-called indifference towards Partition to the latter's "never having experienced it," he makes two misleading points – that only the refugees suffered the

²⁵⁶ Ray has been time and again associated with the school of the Indian bourgeoisie-elite-patriarchs. Here, "esoteric" is not in the sense of "mysterious," but carries the denotation of "impenetrable." This is because many critics think that Ray's works, being based on the Tagorean and other Western philosophical grounds, entail a certain "education" on the part of the audience, in order to grasp them.

repercussion of this event, as if the inflation had not touched the natives; and by pointing to Ray's aristocratic background, as if Ghatak himself belonged to the grassroots.²⁵⁷

What Adorno sees as part of the upshot of culture industry "...individualistic residues, sentimentality and an already *rationaly disposed and adapted romanticism...*" (ibid. 101, emphasis added) form the bases of Ghatak's characterizations of Nita and Sita. I specifically emphasize the phrase "rationally disposed and adapted romanticism" to look at Ghatak's self-proclaimed role as a propagandist, with very clear objectives of spreading out political messages through cinema. In this, he shares an exploitative rather than an aesthetic relationship with the cinematic medium of art.²⁵⁸ Shah observes how Ghatak would bring into play the artistic tropes of tragedy, music and melodrama in film-making, in order to serve the Marxist propaganda,²⁵⁹ and thereby abandon the theory of "Arts for Arts Sake:"

For him, every mode of art must have a specific purpose behind it. Ghatak's was a melancholic mind which never really could cope with the Partition. The nostalgia for the lost motherland turned into an obsession with him. It is this obsession which can be sensed in the song "Come and Liberate" (Esho Mukto Koro) (129).

His position resembles Mao-Tse-Tung's idea about literature's role in communist revolution:

²⁵⁷ At this point, it is not wrong to hark back to the fact that, while Ghatak's father was a colonial government's upper-rank employee, Ray's father Sukumar Ray, the poet, satirist and cartoonist, was known for making spoofs of the British government and officials through his art.

²⁵⁸ What Kumar Shahani, Ghatak's much favored student, comments in this regard, goes against Ghatak's purpose as a filmmaker: "...art which proposes itself either as purely political or as 'mass-communication' can neither achieve its own purpose, declared or otherwise, nor perform that function which it has acquired (through history) by its autonomy, its judgment upon itself inherent in the individual work of art...Culture cannot be put to use by intention, except for short-term goals, either of an immediate nature (as in ritual-based mythology) or in such configurations as arise out of an epic context" (Shahani, "Film as a Contemporary Art" 35-36).

²⁵⁹ Ghatak himself states that his shift to the medium of film was because the IPTA's open-air performance could attract only a few thousand audiences, whereas through films, he could reach out to the wider masses (Shah 124).

Revolutionary literature and art are *part of the whole* revolutionary cause, they are *cogs and wheels* in it, and though in comparison with certain other and *more important parts* they may be *less significant and less urgent and may occupy a secondary position*, nevertheless, they are *indispensable cogs and wheels in the whole machine*, and an indispensable part of the entire revolutionary cause (Khan et al. 114, emphasis mine).

Thus, Ghatak uses the power of affect very strategically, in order to emotionally touch his audience and get across his own account of Partition. An overriding popular impression that all his cinematic messages are radical can grow at the expense of undervaluing the audience's independent imaginations. Like the culture industry that invests towards "making [the masses] into masses" ("Culture Industry Reconsidered" 106), Ghatak's films' emerging as "radical" possibly succeeds through the assumption that the audience's sense of creativity is unalterably hackneyed.²⁶⁰

The anticlimax of Nita's death frames her perfectly as a godlike martyr, who lacks human imperfections. Had she lived longer, got married, continued with her education or refused to run the expenses of her family, she would no longer be "The Refugee Woman" through whom Ghatak's socio-political message may be conveyed. What is known as the "cultural side" of the communist revolution, functions here by the same logic as any other patriarchal machine. The message of the greatest form of pathos is best carried in the figure of the fatigued, star-crossed, attractive and virtuous woman, who is unsurprisingly dead by the time the narrative ends and the crisis is somewhat over. Viewed carefully, in the very combination of a poverty-afflicted refugee

²⁶⁰ Like the culture industry, the efficacy of the archetypes employed "lies in the promotion and exploitation of the ego-weakness to which the powerless members of contemporary society, with its concentration of power, are condemned" (Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered" 105). The components with which the characters of Nita and Sita are fashioned may have been undertaken with the intent of criticizing exactly what it projects. This, however, does not, in any way, lessen their exhortative value to follow a specific trajectory of thought which is married to the idea of power interests: "The consensus which it propagates strengthens blind, opaque authority" (105). At another place, Adorno notes that even as it throws "old branches into crisis by calling them as obsolete" (101), and justifies its presence in terms of public relations and manufacturing "goodwill," culture industry's ontology is made up of "rigidly conservative basic categories" (100).

home with the presence of a “good, messiah”-type refugee woman, exists the seed of premature death. Trina Nileena Banerjee observes:

Thus, like the readers of epics, Ghatak’s audience often knows the end of his narratives. The end is predetermined, the Oracle already uttered, the hero/heroine always-already doomed. Yet the narrative moves forward as if driven forward by a passion for inevitable suffering – it is a spiraling descent into an eternal, inescapable in-betweenness and non-belonging, one that is nonetheless compelling to watch (n.p.).

Ghatak’s films are also analogous to Adorno’s description of representational cinema. As abstract as the elements of these films may be, they always recall a figurative significance and are “never purely aesthetic values” (“Transparencies” 182). The object’s irreducibility in these films point to the social concern and intention, compared to which, the aesthetic realization is secondary. Michael Rothberg sees in such representational art “...the possibility for sadistic identification in members of the audience because it contains a surplus of pleasure” (“After Adorno” 63), and in Adorno’s words: “The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle butt contains ...the power to elicit enjoyment out of it” (“Commitment” 312).

Nita’s seclusion from the household to the sanatorium is followed by a hope in the family, with Shankar rising to great eminence, the house being renovated and Gita’s son growing up into a lively child. However, the story ends at a point where Nita, the epitome of struggle and sacrifice, is removed from this newly found joy and almost forgotten by her kin. While it is not my intention in any way to slight the extreme tragedy embedded in Nita’s marginalization, who was once the most vital member of her family, I read a pessimistic reminiscing exercise in Ghatak’s focusing only on the negative aspects of *bhadra* refugee’s experiences, instead of portraying a more nuanced setting. Just as representing the East Bengali refugee only by his dynamic and courageous traits is unsustainable, similarly limiting the post-immigration

experiences only in terms of adversity tends to shroud the stories of opportunism, success and even domination, that parallelly explained the refugees' contact with West Bengal, especially with Calcutta.

As I raised the argument in the previous section, Ghatak's homage is neither to art nor to creativity, even though he is known as an artist, not a political figure. It is incorrect to associate the highly inventive ideas in his films only to his stance as an artist. In his own words:

Being a Bengali from East Bengal, I have seen the untold miseries inflicted on *my people* in the name of independence – which is a fake and a sham. I have reacted violently towards this and I have tried to portray different aspects of this in my films (*Mandal Settling the Unsettled* 178, emphasis mine).

The presentation of human ordeal in his films comes from a social and political ideologue rather than an aesthete, who aims to voice about *his people* rather than the post-Partition West Bengal's overall state of affairs. It is cultivated on a certain predisposed theory, by employing the wide range of Bengali cultural repository towards feeding a one-sided meaning. The easiest means of preserving this meaning about Self is by constantly laying blame on whatever and whoever does not belong to the director's perception of "*my people*"'s identity.²⁶¹ Here it is also important to refer to Ghatak's family background. Born in an upper middle-class family in Dhaka (currently the capital of Bangladesh), his father Suresh Chandra Ghatak being a district magistrate, poet and playwright, his elder brother Manish Ghatak being a radical writer of his time, an English

²⁶¹ Ghatak apparently embodies the Marxian notion of proletariat, who abstractly erects a "particular interest" as "general interest" (Balibar 94). However, I do not see his appropriation of the proletarian's image as totally ceasing to be a class or ridding itself of the old world. The *avatar* of "Refugee Proletariat" that he strives for is a class of its own and selectively draws from the old bourgeois ideologies that it opposes. Even though, like the proletariat of the *Manifesto*, he does not abide by nationality or religion, Ghatak has his familial, moral and political illusions. Ghatak's contradictory position is also understood in that, while as a materialist he questions the idealization of history, unlike a materialist, he is not anti-ideology/idealism; he is not a negation of politics or ideological abstraction (95).

professor and an IPTA²⁶² theatre activist, who also headed the Tebhaga Andolan in North Bengal, and whose daughter is the renowned author and social activist Mahasweta Devi, Ghatak's lineage in no way reflects non-elite affiliations. The Ghatak family had migrated to Calcutta prior to the Bengal famine (1943) and the country's Partition (1947), which merges their identity with the wealthiest and the most facilitated displaced sections from East Bengal (see Introduction). Additionally, Ghatak's marriage to the Communist Party member Sadhana Roychowdhury's niece Surama Devi insinuates political connections that had strengthened his position as an intellectual within Calcutta. It is therefore vital to keep in mind the inherent differences between his own familial standing and the destitute Bengali refugees he portrays in his works. By "my people," no economic or cultural oneness can be identified between the artist and his subjects, but there is an effort to fashion an imaginary unified *bangal* sub-national entity, which is politically homogenized for realization of a unique identity and power.

Satyajit Ray and *Mahanagar*: Considering Social Crisis Apolitically

Mahanagar belongs to that genre of Satyajit Ray's films which, according to Amaresh Misra, defines his liberal classical bourgeois affiliation, criticizing the capitalist, anti-humanist and pro-technological biases of the social system. In Misra's reflection, while Ghatak referred frequently to the traditional myths and symbols, and emphasized the instinctual non-rational

²⁶² Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) was formed in response to the need for a broad-based unity and to reach a wider section of people. Prior to IPTA, the intellectuals, with active support from the Communist Party, organized themselves to form the Anti-Fascist Writers' Association (1941). Its inception can be marked parallel to the urgency among the socialists and the bourgeois humanists to join hands under the United Front (1935) by Dimitrov, with the aim of fighting fascism. This was also the time when Germany attacked Soviet Union, and Japan laid siege to the eastern frontier of India. A young writer and intellectual like Somen Chanda was brutally murdered in Dhaka. In Bengal, the Students Federation started a movement in 1938, leading to the Youth Cultural Institution (1940), which staged progressive anti-fascist plays. The anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle in the 1940s, especially after the Bengal Famine (1943), led to novel literary expressions that were a break from the traditional forms and contents, bringing in portrayal of workers and peasants in literature, plays, films and paintings. In the field of cinema, Bimal Roy's *Udayar Pathe* (*Awakening* 1944, Bengali), *Do Bigha Zamin* (*Two-thirds of an Acre of Land* 1953, Hindi), Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* (*Lowly City* 1946, Hindi) and films by V. Shantaram set trend to a new genre, whose direct products were Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen (For more, see Khan et al.).

aspects, bringing in a fragmented “modernist” experience, Ray, rooted in the Indian reality, demanded reconstruction of conventional situations and relations. In presenting the multi-layered human saga, Ray dissolved the Westernized divisions and aesthetical parameters between physical and psychological realism, mise-en-scene and montage, form and content.²⁶³ By departing from the patriarchal-paternalistic brahminical mores, he focused instead on the more overbearing but less humane male features.

While Leftist scholars accuse Ray of lacking “commitment” towards socialist ideology,²⁶⁴ and perceive his filmic characters to be “free-floating individuals,” who remain isolated from the historic events of class conflicts, according to Chandak Sengoopta, Ray’s only ideological conviction remains the “autonomy, agency and moral worth of the individual” (Sengoopta 22). In Bert Cardullo’s words, “Like Chekov, Ray refuses to take sides either with

²⁶³ In an interview, Ray states: “Of course, our cultural background, our cultural make-up, is a fusion of East and West. This applies to anybody who has been educated in the city in India and who has been exposed to the classics of English literature...Western music, Western art, Western literature have all been very influential in India. Film, as a purely technological medium of expression, developed in the West. The concept of an art form existing in time is a Western concept, not an Indian one. So, in order to understand cinema as a medium, it helps if one is familiar with the West and Western art form....Someone who has had a Western education is definitely at an advantage” (Udayan Gupta 24). I read this as a realistic situating of his cinematic Self in the postcolonial urban hybridized present, which cannot segregate from its existence the influence of English education and Western culture. Rather than a continuation of the Victorian legacy, it is a sign of the postcolonial Indian cinema’s complex engagement and intersection with the past (Bhowmik 3148). On the other hand, quite in contradiction to his better-known modernist approach, Ghatak’s directorial position viz-a-viz the theme of Bengal Partition merges with the highly anticipated centralized system of film censorship during the rule of the interim government in the late 1940s, with respect to his desire of imbuing morality and giving out an educative social message (3149). Just as centralizing of films was meant to serve the broader political objectives of democracy, citizenship and nationalism (3150), Ghatak’s filmmaking followed a culturally disciplined mode of propagating communism, and by that means made an emotive claim for refugee stronghold in West Bengal, especially in Calcutta. His anti-Western attitude is proclaimed in his elimination of freedom of imagination among the masses, thereby not brooking a possible alternate meaning of refugee-ness outside his own purview of representation.

²⁶⁴ Hank Heifetz states that Ray had no space for the avant-garde genres that decentralize from the plot, as is understood in the films made by Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani. Further, comparing Ghatak with Ray, Levich finds that Ghatak’s films being “implicitly Marxist and revolutionary in spirit,” his “limitless scope, freewheeling intelligence, and passionate political imagination permitted him to make startling connections that never would have occurred to Ray” (Levich n.p.).

characters or ideologies, since he is interested above all in the complexly human...there are no real heroes or villains in his work, no simple winners or losers” (quoted in Sengoopta 16).

In Sengoopta’s observation, although Ray did not display any explicit bias for Marxism like Ritwik Ghatak or Mrinal Sen, his interest in human beings is not all-forgiving (16). Ray’s work scorns any kind of dogmatic stasis, and ranges from the Nehruvian vision of cosmopolitan liberalism²⁶⁵ to the vehement public critique of the Indira Gandhi-directed Emergency period that suspended democracy of the state, replacing it with iron-grip totalitarianism.²⁶⁶ In contrast to the general opinion that Ray’s “ideological position is of no great importance” (16), his Calcutta Trilogy – *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970), *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971) and *Jana Aranya* (The Middleman, 1976) explore the darker side of urban life that is shunned of serenity. *The Adversary* juxtaposes two brothers – one a classic figure of a “Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolutionary” and the other an “unemployed individualist dreamer,” only to conclude that the latter is much more radical than the former, who is entrapped in his narrow communist stereotype. In fact, *The Adversary* holds his own political-philosophical stand:

As a filmmaker, however, I was more interested in the elder brother because he is the vacillating character. As a *psychological entity*, as a *human being with doubts*, he is a more interesting character to me. The younger brother has already identified himself with a cause. That makes him *part of a total attitude* and makes

²⁶⁵ Ray portrayed the city as the sign of progress and village as the past that needs transcendence and renovation, which also roots back to the reformist vibes of Bramho Samaj that his family inter-generationally upheld.

²⁶⁶ In an interview, Ray defends this accusation of his being “not political enough” and making children’s films that are dipped in fantasy and removed from reality, with the argument that attacking the establishment through films does not necessarily touch those who are in the seat of power. Yet, his fantastic genre in *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*The Kingdom of Diamonds*, 1980) had sent out a strong political message, which would otherwise have not been possible to deliver and sustain for a politically more vigorous filmic genre, given the severe censorship at that time. The scene of clean-up where the poor people were dispelled alludes to what happened in Delhi and other cities during Indira Gandhi’s Emergency (Udayan Gupta 27).

him unimportant. *The Naxalite movement takes over. He, as a person, becomes insignificant* (quoted in Udayan Gupta 27, emphasis mine).²⁶⁷

What the criticism of Ray's works thus misses is that his characters, beyond depicting the contemporary times, become emblematic of the celebration of one's human potential despite odds (Sengoopta 19). Contrary to the broader impression that Ray is aloof about the Partition issue, *The Middleman* portrays the dingy conditions of refugee colonies and the impasse of the educated immigrant masses, who are on a lookout for jobs. It is the darkest of the three films, reflecting on how the Emergency years between 1975 and 1977 "explored the putrefying world of petit-bourgeois Calcutta, plagued by power cuts and darkened by economic misery, all-pervasive corruption and political turmoil. Walls were spattered with Maoist slogans, streets were full of unemployed youth and business districts seethed with unbridled greed and total disregard for morality or any kind of law" (Sengoopta 20). This film, as Sengoopta points out, hits the melodramatic chord that one never associates with Ray, and includes political scenes and statements, which are shown through the character of a politician who lies under the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's portrait and jabbars nonsense about the impending bright future of the nation's youth (20).²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ The apparent political inertness of the elder brother in *Adversary* is reminiscent of Adorno's negative aesthetic of silence, which, according to him, is "...functionally motivated by the desire "to rationalize" its own predestined failure. But this would be no refusal of the administered society which made Auschwitz possible, since "to instrumentalize art is to undercut the opposition art mounts against instrumentalism." Art's role is its "afunctionality," and thus its success lies in its own failure...Hence Adorno values the *proximity* of the art to silence. This proximity is not an abdication but an articulation of suffering" (Rothberg 69). On the other hand, the "action" that the Naxalite and Left-oriented youths take pride in can be identified with Adorno's description of the Nazi leaders: "...he is obsessed by the desire of *doing things*...indifferent to the content of such action. He makes a cult of action, activity, of so-called *efficiency* as such, which reappears in the advertising image of the active person" (Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz" 27). Identifying oneself totally with the scheme of the Naxalite actions leads to what Adorno would call ceding of one's "particular" before the "prevailing universal:" "With the loss of their identity and power of resistance, people also forfeit those qualities by virtue of which they are able to pit themselves against what at some point might lure them again to commit atrocity" (21-22).

²⁶⁸ Prior to this, *Aranyer Din Ratri* (*Days and Nights in the Forest*, 1969) is also a significant commentary about the social and moral failings of the class of urban bourgeoisie, as is revealed in their clumsy dealings with women,

Critics also spurn Ray's sanguine message in *Mahanagar*, which he made against the backdrop of the Indo-China War (1962) and in the aftermath of Partition, showing the steep infiltration of refugees into West Bengal, high statistics of unemployment and breakdown of urban economies.²⁶⁹ Yet, in this film, Ray projects Calcutta in light of infinite possibilities. Many critics find it objectionable that the film ends optimistically with the couple aspiring, after all, to make a living for themselves in the Calcuttan metropolis. For example, Paulomi Chakraborty reads the film as a formative investment in the project of modernity through a purposeful amnesia, which replaces the city's past and posits it as a romantic entity. In her examination, Calcutta is presented through the shades of Bengal Renaissance started by the *bhadralok* class, at the cost of removing the disruptive episode of Partition, thereby limning a teleological and hegemonic narrative of "the new."

In my reading, *Mahanagar* approaches the watershed from a point of extraordinary confidence on humanitarian grounds. The film's strength lies in underlining what the post-Partition Bengali immigrants have and what they can. This is different from the pessimistic outlook originated by Ghatak, for whom narrating Partition through myth, art and music

inebriety, self-pity and exploitation of the tribal *Santhals*. In the *Distant Thunder* (1973), a plot based on the 1943 Bengal famine, Ray's message, in Sengoopta's analysis, raises above the traditional prejudices, with his Brahmin protagonist making an almost socialist remark about the idle rural rich living off the peasants' labour, and despising the caste system (19). Critics like Pauline Kael sees this male protagonist Gangacharan having a reflection of Ray's own guilt of weakness for lacking political commitment (Udayan Gupta 28), and there is a common notion about his tendency to romanticize poverty, such that it never looks ugly. In Rajadhyaksha's words, such foreign reviews on Ray's Trilogy look at "...an India not unfamiliar to the West, the mythic vision of 'timeless purity' and the 'world without sin', present from the time of the German Orientalist tradition in the 19th century, and later captured by Kipling and Forster..." (Rajadhyaksha 31). Nonetheless, when this allegation of romanticism applies to the apparently unbelievable lush setting that contradicts the situation of famine in the *Distant Thunder*, one ought to realize that the plentiful nature itself is a revolutionary statement mirroring the reality. It is through Ray's consciously chosen verdant setting that the ruthless man-made artificial crisis is revealed, which had claimed innumerable lives, even as everything around remained physically wholesome (Gupta 29).

²⁶⁹ By 1967-68, 80% of the Bengalis were officially defined as "poor" (Sengoopta 19).

converges on an ordinary aim of advocating rights for only a specific group to which he belong, in the process silencing how other Calcuttans too underwent hardship. Ray's attitude towards the overdrawn despondent city of Calcutta is much more humane than Ghatak – while the latter heaves complaints against the city as if it were solely responsible for the East Bengalis' immigration, their joblessness and Bengal's Partition, the former sees the city as a fellow-sufferer with the Bengali populace, both natives and immigrants.²⁷⁰ In *Mahanagar*, Calcutta epitomizes the same situation as the *bhadralok* refugee family – once prestigious, run-down today. Critics point out that in the narration of this film, Ray does not raise the class issue and so the question of refugees is not addressed clearly. On the other hand, as I have shown earlier, it is problematic to reckon refugees as a separate “class.” Paulomi Chakraborty sees Ray's characters to be “less East Bengali,” just because the family shown in the film does not speak any of the East Bengali dialects. Here Chakraborty is constricting both the refugee and the East Bengali Self into a questionable oneness, by obviating all such families and individuals who had long-term pre-Partition connections with West Bengal, especially Calcutta, and so could speak the Calcuttan tongue. As a way of asserting a nebulous “*bangal*-hood” in post-Partition Calcutta, Chakraborty looks out for a detailing of “past,” which means a detailing of *bangal* “purity.” I see her reading as inspired by Ghatak's search for “genuine” cultural roots, by which he avoids to come to terms with the hybrid postcolonial reality of the Indian nation-state. Unlike Ghatak, Ray

²⁷⁰ Somdatta Mandal notes: “To Ghatak, Calcutta symbolized corruption, degradation and decay. It inflicted violence on those who had come to live here, as Ghatak had, by force of historical circumstance: the Partition” (70). In films like *Nagarik*, *Meghe Dhaka Tara* and *Subarnarekha*, Calcutta is depicted as “a victimizer of people” She also observes that he had shown the city as a victim too – with immigrants, poverty and squalor. Thus, in his films, Calcutta is discovered as “a Calcutta of discontent, a Calcutta of hate, a Calcutta of despair, degradation and dehumanization. It finally boils down to a Calcutta of anger, of seething fury and therefore, ironically, a Calcutta of passion, a city that goes on living, loving and hoping” (70). However, unlike Ray, Ghatak in my understanding studied all these emotions from a refugee's rather than a Bengali's point of view. As he chose to voice only the immigrants' issues, he organically remained detached from the soul of the city. While Calcutta for Ray was a part of his Self, for Ghatak, this Self was East Bengal, compared to which he persistently estranged his connection with Calcutta.

does not cater to this collective egotism of a particular people, and instead shows Calcutta's hodge-podge urban milieu beyond narrow identity fetishes, for better or for worse. While there are no Dalit or Muslim characters in *Mahanagar* as they appear at the fringes of Ghatak's films, Ray depicts the subtle gaps among different *bhadra* East Bengali characters, who are distinct in their respective class realities. For example, the status personified by Arati's boss cannot be matched up with that of Arati's family, although they both signify *bhadra* modes of existence. That Arati and her husband, instead of losing faith in the city or trying to extract political and material benefits off its already exhausted resources, still believe in its hopeful prospects, renders a rare public-spirited perspective. *Mahanagar*, thus, champions a steadfast reliance in humanity and in everything beautiful at a time of turbulence and skepticism, which is no less tribute to socialism than Ghatak's separatist and politically oriented visions.

Ghatak's unique position that combines the maudlin sentiments with Marxian elements has often been posed against the classic-realist "Ray standard" (referring to Satyajit Ray). Like Bertolt Brecht, not only does Ghatak turn cinema into a tool for "fighting conception of the modern," but his works on Partition are motivated with bringing back "the moment of rupture to consciousness, a moment that the traumatised *do not know how to remember*" (Biswas, "Her Mother's Son" n.p., emphasis mine). Trina Nileena Banerjee notes that Ghatak's epic style narration's essentially repetitive nature implies his "dogged refusal to forget" (n.p.), and by attacking the "sturdy optimism of nationalism's dominant narrative," he points to "the criminal act of history that has enabled the erasure of the moment of rupture that lies at the heart of the nation's narrative of 'progress' and sovereignty" (n.p.). In my understanding, however, while Ray, without revealing his own bias, merely serves an artist's function in depicting the post-

Partition Calcuttan scenario, Ghatak takes on a moralizing role in trying to channelize the collective memory through his neurotic treatment of the urban.²⁷¹

Heifetz observes that Ray's work, rather than projecting realism, focuses on myths

of the supreme of individual and limited moral choice, of women as charged poles of influence on weaker or tradition-bound men, of sexual desire outside marriage as emblematic of corruption, of the exaltation of childhood, all of these conditioned by the fact that he remained till the end an 'aristocrat'...(72).

He studies Ray's intellectual aristocracy as a product of the Indian (Bengal) Renaissance and the progressive reform movement of the late 19th century and the early 20th century, which bears a strong loyalty to the cultural-aesthetic value system originating from the Tagore family. Seeing Ray as necessarily an elitist-patriarch, Heifetz analyzes his women characters, as in *Mahanagar*, as being represented in conservative terms, since they do not transgress the status-quo of the social and familial power relations.²⁷² Despite being etched against urban settings, which claim a secular rather than a "fatalistic" ambience, the women in Ray's film, according to Heifetz, are shaped in the mold of the Indian conceptualization of Goddess – "fecund and destructive, loving and terrifying, the natural world as nourishment and as threat" (73). Such "emancipated" woman is a direct product of the "reawakened" Bengali culture, which came into being as a result of

²⁷¹ What John E. Frohmayer, former chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts, calls as "documentary images" in the context of Holocaust can be related to Ghatak's deterministic way of interpreting, if not representing, the Partition: "Documentary images...hold up the "having-been-there" of the victim and the victimizer, of the horror. They remove doubt..." On the other hand, what Frohmayer refers to as the "aesthetic" echoes Ray's approach: "...In contrast, the aesthetic is said to introduce agency, control, structure, and therefore distance from the real, a distance which could leave space for doubt" (quoted in Hirsch 10).

²⁷² This is in line with Paulomi Chakraborty's criticism about Arati in *Mahanagar*, who she sees as slipping into "a subordinate, instrumental function to imagining and imaging the modern," as the radical question of her agency is "reducible as a function of individual moral than a historical force" (Chakraborty, "The Refugee Woman" 80). According to Chakraborty, Arati's iconic modern womanhood does not challenge the status-quo, such that she invokes agency from within the appropriate boundaries of *bhadramahila*'s newfound freedom. She is understood as a string-puppet of the jubilant and self-congratulatory attitude of the new patriarchy.

colonization. The guidance and strength that she provides to the weaker male characters, can hardly infringe the archaic patriarchal assumptions (73).

It is ironical that Ray, the maker of *Devi*,²⁷³ falls suspect of deific treatment of his female characters, whereas Ghatak, in spite of overlapping the postcolonial female characters in his films with unreal herculean paradigms, is celebrated as a radical Marxist intellectual.²⁷⁴ In my further discussion, I compare how the two filmmakers differently treat the idea of a female's deification. In that way, I put forth my argument that Ray's portrayal of women, refugee or otherwise, is much more nuanced than that of Ghatak's. I also advance this assertion in my analysis of Arati's character from *Mahanagar*. In *Devi*, Ray's technique is very close to Ghatak's, as he weaves the plot with the elements of traditional *Darshakavya* (visual poetic drama), combining religious beliefs with the 20th century cinematic techniques. However, the female protagonist Doyamoyee, who is apotheosized by her father-in-law as an incarnation of Goddess *Kali*, is a complete reversal of Ghatak's heroines, especially Nita.²⁷⁵ In Nita's lack of agency, both in life and in death, does her weak human-like character peep out. It is particularly a straitlaced message in the film that not even for once does she fail her people's expectations in the image of "Maa" *Jagaddhatri*. She is larger-than-life in fulfilling all the needs, only failing to sustain herself. Thus, she is, from the very beginning of the film, a successful occupant of "The Goddess"'s pedestal, even if in the garb of a plain woman. On the contrary, Doyamoyee in Ray's

²⁷³ Satyajit Ray's film *Devi* (*The Goddess*, 1960) is based on a short story by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee.

²⁷⁴ The three "Fathers of Bengali cinemas" of the mid-1960s – Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen – were all centering their work on women's issues, as for instance, Satyajit Ray's *Devi* (*The Goddess*, 1960), *Teen Kanya* (*Three Daughters*, 1961), *Mahanagar* (*The Big City*, 1963) and *Charulata* (1964); Mrinal Sen's *Baishe Shrabon* (*Wedding Day*, 1960), *Punascha* (*Over Again*, 1961) and *Abasheshe* (*At Last*, 1962); and Ritwik Ghatak's Partition trilogy – *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (*The Cloud-Capped Star*, 1960), *Komal Gandhar* (*A Soft Note on a Sharp Scale*, 1961) and *Subarnarekha* (*The Golden Thread*, 1965).

²⁷⁵ Spivak sees *Devi* as "the dark consequences of a *dvaita avatarana* – where the moment is sustained into stabilized worship of an unfortunate young female person" ("Moving *Devi*" 123).

Devi is nothing but a vulnerable young rural bride throughout, shown with all conceivable human flaws, regardless of whether her entire family or even she herself is made to believe that she is the *devi*. As the divine superimposition of *Kali* with this human female never takes place smoothly and without violence, there can be no easy identification of Doyamoyee as the super-woman figure. Unlike Nita, who achieves her goddess-ness through everyday mundane services to her immediate surroundings, Doya is outright placed at the domestic deity's altar and worshipped by her family members and pilgrims. Yet, the camera's lighting differences in case of Nita and Doya says it all – while the close-up shots of Nita's bright face against the star-like sparkles rippling in her hair adds a supra-real atmosphere, Doya, once proclaimed as the *devi*, is always shown hemmed in an oppressive grey light. So while Ghatak's focus is on how others see Nita, Ray's focus is on Doya's own inner psychic world. In the closing scenes, Ghatak's women are rendered a fragile non-entity status outside of the respective archetypes. On the other hand, Ray's film closes with the note of Doya's insanity and agency as a human woman acquiring inscrutable traits of *Kali*, which is also her most powerful state of existence, as is cinematically depicted with a bright glare all around her. This is very unlike Ghatak's women, who are the most prevailing as “goddesses” but as humans, have no promising part to play. As Ray's Doya is not able to give panaceas for sick children as a *devi* should, but has total charge over her own entity in deciding to commit suicide, she appears as an existentialist hero.

According to Rajadhyaksha, the realist school in India that draws its inspiration from Ray's cinema carries in it the bankruptcy of the realist tradition, and having been inspired mainly by the Western realism, also bears the latter's inherent contradictions.²⁷⁶ Rajadhyaksha states that

²⁷⁶ What Fischer notes as the crisis of the critical-realists – the fact that they “analyse bourgeois society with clear-sighted negation, sympathise with any resistance to it (especially by individuals) but are nevertheless incapable of

if a mythic system is not actively displaced by a work of art, its content gets caught within the mythic system itself (32). For him, Ghatak's works have innovative values that challenge the complex mythic system, thereby taking on the dominant tradition through their epic form. He sees Ghatak's "arbitrary conventions" that are "revealed in a broader political light," to be parallel to the Eisensteinian principle of treating "art as revolutionary praxis" (32). In comparison, despite its compassionate near-cosmic dimensions and generating a new eye for perceiving the mundane, Ray's *Pather Panchali*'s neorealism "seems to accept a tradition for what it is" (31). Unlike Rossellini, who uses war as an experience to examine characters and relationships, Ray does not exploit his contemporaneous political scenario to generate a deterministic social message.

To counter Rajadhyaksha's evaluations, it is important to remember that Ghatak's works can be analogized with that of the revivalist historians. Even as his ideology is seemingly very different from the latter, he too deploys the corpus of Indian mythologies for political aims. While revivalist historians use the Hindu Brahmanical archetypes to filter out essentialist meanings from a heterogeneous past and fill them up in an equally heterogeneous present and future, Ghatak, through subversion of archetypes, evokes a selective *bhadralok* consciousness. Ghatak forgoes the logic that because these myths do not espouse the entire Bengali populace, they may not be the referential point for many, on the face of a social crunch like Partition. By "many," I do not only signify the Bengali Muslims and the Bengali Dalits, but also a substantial section of the upper-caste Bengali Hindu *babus*, whose constant interchange with the Western culture under colonial influence could have prevented them from mastering the precolonial Brahminical knowledge-system. I disagree that an art, while dialogizing with myth, should

perceiving a social perspective. They hate and despise the bourgeoisie without being able to see an alternative" (quoted in Rajadhyaksha 28) – can also be applied towards criticizing Ghatak's films.

always compete with the latter with political or otherwise rebellious intents. Such a view surrenders the beauty and aesthetic-cultural depths of myths to the temporary, self-seeking and comparatively lesser permanent political goals. By repetitively offering a purposeful weight to the Partition history, Ghatak, with the most unpoetic vengeance, shrinks everything before and after Partition into the Partition itself. Ray does not participate in such emotional masochism, and thereby does not twist the myths to serve the particularistic leitmotifs of his cinematic or social philosophy.

***Mahanagar*: Beyond the Kitsch called “Refugee Experience”**

In *Mahanagar*, the vital question that Arati’s Eurasian colleague Edith asks – why red on the lip should be considered derogatory for a Hindu woman, if the same “red-ness” is obligatory on her hair-parting and forehead, and in fact inscribes her “pureness” – throws a deep ironic statement about the Hindu *bhadralok* and the way he has reduced the social meaning of *bhadramahila*. Misra’s observation that “...an apparently inconsequential act of a traditional woman applying lipstick took the contours of a social event interlaced with a variety of meanings” (Misra 1052), points to the instabilities that lipstick as a symbol brings into Arati’s life, with respect to her poise as a Hindu housewife. What *Mahanagar* does but *Meghe Dhaka Tara* or *Subarnarekha* does not, is to provide a personalized platform to the story of the female protagonist, who, despite being a bearer of the socio-economic adversities of Partition, cannot be entirely defined in terms of her refugee identity. I see the film as an antithesis to the nationalized accounts that have been consciously appropriating or misrepresenting women. The heroine has a different story to offer about her own professional sphere, which, even if carrying the lasting impressions of Partition, succeeds to overcome the nostalgia and suffering caused as a result of Partition. The plot does not follow Ghatak’s predictable line, where the Bengali refugee woman

is put up as a demi-Goddess, and epitomized as a miniaturized, bonsai Bengali nationhood. In the length of the journey traversed by Arati from her home to the world lies a distantiation from the immediate post-Partition syndromes. During this phase, she acquires components of optimism and individualism. Arati does not enact the role of a gendered mythical doll, who is portrayed in the tragic, messianic shades by the patriarchal history. Compared to Nita, whose tenacious *bhadra* conduct keeps the last strings of prestige attached to her impoverished family, or Sita, whom Ghatak grants a disgraceful death for choosing to marry a Dalit and later, resort to prostitution, Arati's ventures as a saleswoman – someone traditionally looked down upon by the *bhadralok* – narrates a new experience. She is not only a direct correlate to the male members of the refugee community, but also a part of an all-female team. Her husband Subrata's quipping that Arati is too attractive to work in an office exposes the bourgeois male attitude in the post-Partition period that viewed women's employment as unplanned and unfortunate. These men would portray the female office-goers as pitiable targets of sensual gazes and physical exploitation. In contrast, Arati's office represents a vibrant, candid ambiance occupied by young female professionals, who discuss fashion, salaries and humorous pseudo-erotic encounters with male clients.

Having moved from their earlier base in Pabna, the post-Partition economic rearrangement in Arati's in-laws' family calls for a change in the traditional family relations. As a revered teacher and a reigning patriarch, the audience can imagine the power that Arati's father-in-law used to command prior to Partition. In the post-Partition overpopulated milieu of Calcutta, he suffers from an identity crisis that widely marked the jobless older generation

migrants.²⁷⁷ Arati's husband Subrata is a direct product of such male-dominated household, as reflected in his remark about Arati's professional success: "Exit husband, enter wife." He is an "over-educated under-paid" male (Callenbach 48), who is in the process of receiving newer cultural jolts in a Calcutta demographically bursting at its seams. His insecurity is explicit when his younger sister Bani encourages Arati to take up a film-star's job in Bombay, and imagines the latter as a sunglass and lipstick-decked glamorous, rich woman. Subrata reflexively slights Bani after this comment for being a student of home-science, a field of study designed for grooming ideal housewives and mothers.²⁷⁸ In this conversation, the two young females are not necessarily adapting their dreams to fill up the financial crater of the family, but lending wings to their self-referential desires. Becoming a fashionable woman is more precisely Bani's own personal aspiration, which thwarts her prosaic rearing in a middle-class home, as a daughter to be duly given away for marriage.

After Edith gifts a lipstick and sunglasses to Arati, she, as a saleswoman, momentarily meets Bani's fantasy about her as a "film star." As Chakraborty mentions, for Arati's husband Subrata, this lipstick is "a metonym of his wife's unrestrained sexuality, her unsuitable, inappropriate and disruptive modernity" ("The Refugee Woman and the New Woman" 82). His

²⁷⁷ Concept of rebirth of the economically fallen adult refugee (see anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's arguments in Parrinder, "Entering Dystopia, Entering 'Erewhon'"), who is conceived as the liable child of the new nation-state following the death of his former independent identity, can be observed in the infantilized characters, such as Nita's father or Arati's father-in-law. Nita and Arati respectively treat them with a maternal superfluity of affection. On the other hand, towards the closing scene of *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Nita's in-built mature and sedate demeanor gives way to a fretful outbreak of emotions, turning her into a child immediately prior to her destined death.

²⁷⁸ Kim Berry reveals that the discipline of home-science had been imported to the post-independence India through Nehru-led Congress' initiative of Community Development Program, which carried with its baggage the typical features of capitalist relations of production, reliance on science and technology and enhancement of living standards through individualist material acquisitions. Douglas Ensminger notes that while the home extension agents infiltrated new technologies, these modern methods were heavily tinged with urban gendered bourgeois ideologies in the name of a more planned and "tasteful" life, and also positioned the rural women homogeneously as homemakers, rather than farm-workers too. The new patriarchy introduced consumerism with the aim of transforming rural communities into capitalist and patriarchal farming families (Berry 1056).

feeling becomes more obvious, as he discovers the lipstick at a moment of gender-reverse performance – while opening Arati’s purse and taking out money to pay the maidservant – a task conventionally associated with the non-earning housewife. On the other hand, as Edith gives it to Arati saying that lipstick is “good for business,” and afterwards, the former is seen reading the “Indian Book of Sex, the Famous One,” the semiotics of the film connects a woman’s sexuality with business. Apart from lipstick, this increased sexual vulnerability, as Chakraborty notes, is also revealed in Arati’s light cotton sari and sheer blouse. Yet, notwithstanding how others perceive her, Arati herself utilizes this lipstick to maintain her “professional persona,” as is understood in her gestures of wiping it off before entering home, or putting it on before negotiating a pay raise with her boss. While there is a duality associated with these acts that resonate with the *bhadra* class, there is also a flighty treatment towards the moral foundations of *bhadramahila*-hood. It is therefore questionable, as Chakraborty does, to interpret Arati’s resignation from the job and running downstairs to her husband, as “a relief” from “ugly suggestion” to a “safe place” of bourgeois security. Because Arati is Edith’s close friend, who embodies every contrary aspect to that of a *bhadramahila*, and defends this “non-*bhadramahila*” against her *bhadralok* boss, she cannot be assumed guilty for being a professional woman. It is not enough to see Arati only with respect to her sex appeal or modesty, as she is constantly playing with her physical appearance and putting it to test against her male relationships – from husband at home to boss in the office – in order to explore her own identity. Ray’s achievement in outliving “The Refugee Experience” lies in the fact that the crossing point of Arati’s sexuality and profession neither brings out her agency nor her guilt, but instead shows the different facets of her shy self-experimentations.

The women in *Mahanagar* cannot be considered as entirely positive or clearly negative, because apart from family ties, each is bound to another by her own requirements. The mother-in-law, for example, is both affronted at Arati's taking up a job and also relieved when she brings home the essentials with her salary; Bani loves her sister-in-law but a tinge of obligation and awe outlines her feelings, especially after Arati becomes the only earning member of the family. The inter-relational aspects among the females reflect economic clout. As Arati's husband is initially the sole bread-earner of the family, her position with respect to her mother-in-law is never inferior. In fact, the power equation polarizes to Arati's side with her coming out of the domestic margins and becoming a jobholder. Both Arati and Nita's working status summon an inversion of gender space and gender roles, as is reflected in significant moments, such as Nita returning after a day's work and Sanat serving her a glass of water, or Arati's mother-in-law serving her the lunch and afterwards cleaning away her dish, as if she were the patriarch of the household. While both these women dispense their salary for their respective kinfolk's needs, Nita's act of giving is programmed and pressurized by her circumstances, hardly allowing the audience to inquire her will, whereas Arati, spending at least a part of her first income on buying gifts, is allowed a relatively greater room of independence. As a result, neither Arati's profession nor her household is able to wring out duties from her, as she ultimately does not compromise her core Self and is in charge of her own priorities. Contrarily, Nita becomes the utopia of a male idealist, devoting her wages for her family's prosperity, even as her obligatory job looms on her in the form of depression, disease and death. The employed Arati's attitude towards the other female members – her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, subtly touches on the role of a female patriarch. Arati's sister-in-law Bani is the most subservient of the three existing female members in the family, in terms of economic dependence and age. When Bani expresses her desire to quit

education in order to partake a share in the family's burden of poverty, Arati instead asks her to cook the family dinner in order to prove how prudent she is. Here is an unspoken pact made between the financially prevailing and the financially immobilized female – that the former shall bear the education expenses incurred by the latter at the cost of consigning the traditional domestic tasks to her. Thus, Bani takes over the chores that customarily demanded Arati's attention, including the tending of Arati's baby son during her absence, in exchange of the continuation of her further education. At this stage, Bani's mentoring into a full-fledged *bhadramahila* with the aid of formal schooling is made possible with Arati's support, though not completely without asking for self-seeking returns.

Arati is caring and dutiful to each member, but not an icon of sacrifice. Her sense of guilt is very clearly articulated, in scenes where she recompenses her son with different kinds of allurements and thus tries to normalize her "working woman's" persona at home. Her guilt is amplified when she throws away her lipstick to prove that she is indeed the former Arati. In doing so, she proves to operate from within the given yardsticks of an androcentric society. Nevertheless, she is not goddess-like in her virtues, but timidly picking up from her job experience and the public space, until family does not remain her only pretext for being the earning woman. Her husband is perplexed, when she lets out her knowledge about "commission" – a money earned besides the basic salary through negotiation with the boss. At this point, she also mentions her boss by his first name, calling him Himangshu *babu* rather than Mr. Mukherjee. In all these actions, a subjective side of a demanding worker comes up, who, in the process of manufacturing want among others, has also herself learnt to desire. This newly acquired desire is clearly shown in the scene, where Arati sniffs the money in her first pay-envelope (Callenbach 47). Nita, on the other hand, working both at home and in the office, is

unable to get the most out of her earning status, as she cannot centralize her importance either within or without.

At the end of *Mahanagar*, Arati's quitting of her job has a particular ethical basis, where her gender consciousness goes above her middle-class, upper-caste, economically stressed and immigrant aspects of identity. When her boss, an immigrant Bengali himself, tries to overrate her by insulting Edith, Arati is keen enough to see a flirtatious innuendo underlying his professed desire of establishing nationalistic and provincial kinship with her. Ray has moved ahead of the "Ghatak school's" impression that immigrant-based coalitions can always be smoothly accomplished, by questioning the very assumption that "refugee-ness" is homogeneous. He disagrees that a pre-Partition geographical closeness between two people can disregard their present-day class-based differences, within the metropolitan structure of Calcutta. As more commercially tenable factors such as profit, greed and success get pulled into the relationships, Arati, as an urban middle-class female immigrant, can connect more with her female Eurasian colleague, than her rich male East Bengali boss. Her friendship with Edith is possible, by overlooking the linguistic-communal differences and instead espousing the gender-economic sameness. Ironically, her decision to quit the job falls on her unwaged husband's pre-conceited mind as a great wifely sacrifice in order to sate his ego, lest he has to accept her help in establishing himself professionally. So the "optimism" that critics commonly disapprove in *Mahanagar's* ending, where Arati's quitting of her job is viewed in terms of her "cyclic return" to her marital duty to share her husband's burden and "her transgressive energy fine-tuned to remain appropriate to her being a companion wife" (Chakraborty, "The Refugee Woman and the New Woman" 84), can be argued as simplistic. The conjugal resolution does not happen either through the wife's submission or through her messianic support. Even as the couple walk

together in search for a new future, Arati by this time has acquired a distinct public Self apart from her husband and her family, as she is not only capable of applying for a job, but also brave enough to resign it, if deemed objectionable. Her first job experience as a saleswoman, in which she has earned money by endorsing material needs among other homemaker women, breeds the bourgeois spirit of consumerism, an economy of desire and choice, as well as the agency to reject these commercial traps. It hints that in the future, she may become an actor rather than a target of the market. According to Paulomi Chakraborty, Arati's company's selling the knitting machine, which replaces hand knitting, her gifting her son a toy gun rather than telling him fairy-tales, the family's borrowing a thermometer from the neighbour or the intermittent flowing in of evening news from the radio – imply a touch of technology that conceals the past. Arati's image as the new woman is made possible by covering up her Partition experiences, wherein her entity as the refugee woman exists. Yet, to counter Chakraborty's assertion, while Arati is not a part of the utopic Communist dream as motivated by Ghatak's cinematic canon, she is also not crushed like Nita, under its ambiguously liberating forces.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I show how the romanticization and sentimentalization of memory viz-a-viz the Bengal Partition extends its influence to post-Partition Bengali films by Ritwik Ghatak. I analyze the signal of affect that Ghatak's tragic icon Nita carries, and study why *Meghe Dhaka Tara* remains the benchmark in defining the refugee experience in Bengali cinematic context, in a way putting into oblivion other filmic works and characters from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s decades. I understand how a preferred way of visualizing the Partition of Bengal transpires through rendering an avant-garde image to Ghatak's cinema, in comparison to which Satyajit Ray is largely criticized for his supposed indifference towards Partition. I problematize Ghatak's

Marxist treatment of the Bengali as well as the Brahmanical repertoire of cultural knowledge, for the purpose of carving out a Communist significance of the period. Rather than recontextualization of traditional myths, I see in this attitude a nostalgic particularistic abstraction of a rich array of aesthetic ideas, which are best appreciated in their digressive cultural context. As a scholar of literature, I find it unsupportable that creative opuses of vast potential are utilized to serve political goals, with at times a kitschy aim of strengthening a certain group of people. In other words, I oppose how Ghatak breaks down the traditions from different spatial and temporal coordinates to serve his foremost purpose of representing the plight of the Bengali Refugee – making a powerful integrated identity of the traumatized subject at the cost of erasing class, caste, communal and gender distinctions. He is himself part of the artistic manipulation that he criticizes, which “tends to compress reality into an artistic whole with limits imposed by time and space” (“Cinema and the Subjective Factor” 63). His effort has over the years accumulated a shortcut route to the sign of Bengal Partition itself. A direct consequence of such shortcuts is, for example, the Tagorean song “*Je rate mor duar-guli bhanglo jhore*” (“That night when the storm shattered my doors”) being disremembered for its more universally philosophical-spiritual vision, as it is made to become the Partition-abandoned unmarried refugee girl Nita’s song in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*. Seen this way, Ray is labeled as a conservative because of his resistance in seeing Partition only through the politico-cultural apertures formed by the immigrant-*bhadralok* Leftist conglomerate. Cinematic celebration of a particular kind of memory amounts to parading of liberalism through continuous uprooting of whatever is its opposite, in other words “Bourgeois,” or that which does not limit itself to such a memory’s chosen summative system of remembering. The fact that *Mahanagar* does not count in the collective Bengali psyche as one of the most recognized Partition films, and even

Subarnarekha, with its Dalit intellectual and a noncompliant *bhadramahila*, is partly overlooked by this bracketed memorial exercise, goes on to show the nature of the “Past” that such a memory holds on to, and in turn its own constitution. Such a memory, as generated by Ghatak’s films, submits to Adorno’s analysis, which Rothberg interprets as follows:

In these writers – one who proleptically internalized the disaster, the other who retrospectively maintains its absent presence – the notion of art’s barbarity is not refuted but enacted in order to present the barbarity of the age. This allows them to avoid the more chilling paradox present in “the so-called artistic representation” of historical terror: “When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder” (“Commitment” 312-13, quoted in Rothberg 63).

As refugee-ness in West Bengal keeps mutating and spotlighting newer problems and demands in the succeeding decades of the post-Partition period, artists like Ghatak’s preoccupation with definitive meanings of Partition betrays their obstinate desire to hold on to a cherished vacuum. To begin with, this can surely be the consequence of a profound melancholy and homesickness. Yet, there is also every chance that in the later stages, these artists have been continuing to build on the melancholic, from a composed and what is worse, political position. Talking about sentimental issues in retrospect and pointing out *only* the tragic chapters from a narrative, whose other versions are also known to them is, in my mind, a kitsch employed very skilfully. When an otherwise brilliant thinker like Ghatak attempts to risk his talent and settle for such mediocrity, apparently to keep paying service to “Partition,” he is answerable to art for the artistic delusion he bestows to his posterity. In this way, he himself flinches from the Upanishadic philosophy that had motivated his film *Subarnarekha*’s ending:

Charana Vai Madhuvindute Charana Hrimadhuswaram. Suryasya Pashya Premanam Yotendrayete Charana. Charaiveti Charaiveti (Mobility is immortality, mobility is religion, just look at the treasures (light) of the sun, they have never slept...since the inception of creation. So strive forward, strive forward (“Subarnarekha – A Review” n.p., translation from Sanskrit).

CONCLUSION: “More Or Less” Refugee? State of Affairs Today

In conclusion, I bring to the table some of my reflections, in the course of watching films, encountering people and observing circumstances. I hope these considerations will help to clarify how my thesis connects with the everyday spirit of West Bengal in the recent times, especially Kolkata (the changed name of Calcutta since January 2001).

Firstly, I will talk about two recent films, *Lizard* (or *Detective*) (*Tiktiki* 2012, Bengali), directed by Raja Dasgupta, which is a small-screen drama aired as a telefilm in Tara TV Bangla, and Anik Dutta-directed *The Ghost's Future* (*Bhooter Bhabishyat* 2012, Bengali), which became a big hit on the silver screen. Upon watching the former, I wonder if this is not the inevitable fruit of the culture industry sown in Bengali cinema years ago by Ritwik Ghatak's Bengal Partition oeuvres. *Tiktiki* is an adaptation of *Sleuth*, a 1970 play written by Anthony Shaffer. In the original story, the play is set in the Wiltshire manor house of Andrew Wyke, an immensely successful mystery writer, who is obsessed with inventions and deceptions of fiction and fascinated with game-playing. He baits his wife's lover to the house and convinces him to stage a robbery of her jewellery. In the Bengali version *Tiktiki*, there is additionally a strong influence of the Ghatakian “school of thought.” The plot appears to be highly cerebral and avant-garde, informed from various resources, touching on moralistic points about the Bengal Partition, and features veteran actors such as Soumitro Chatterjee and Koushik Sen. To top it all, it brings back the stimulating debate about the West Bengali “they” versus the East Bengali “us.” The story's design is simple, and as I read it, simplistic. An aging West Bengali man, predictably shown as a rich aristocrat, has locked horns with a “naïve rustic poor” but more intelligent refugee youth from Faridpur, over a sexual tussle involving the former's wife. The West Bengali man's emasculated character, which is one of the implied reasons why his wife got drifted towards the

refugee youth, immediately calls to mind a popularized myth that East Bengali men are more robust and masculine than their native counterparts. In the West Bengali man's concocting a brain game to trap his rival, and the latter's surviving his vile tactics and, in fact, defeating him by his own logic, one can clearly see bits and pieces of *Arjun* and *Purbo Paschim*, Sunil Ganguly's two canonical Bengal Partition novels. These novels vividly describe the "highly accomplished" refugees' ill-treatment at the hands of the native *bhadralok*. In this tight dichotomous discourse, the native grassroots and humbler population are forever absent.

Furthermore, the problematic part, as I have detailed in Ghatak's chapter, is the *bhadra* lower middle-class refugees' persuasive camouflaging within the "Dalit, deprived" refugees' image. The two main characters shown in *Tiktiki* are abstract and overgeneralized symbols of two stock types of Bengali-ness – the "*Bangal*" and the "*Ghoti*." In the limitation of both these types, the other Bengalis suffer a lack of representation. The opulent West Bengali's prototype is shown to embody the entire old-Calcuttan baggage of "Urban Native-ness." Such a representation is as suspicious and stereotyped as the modest East Bengali's prototype, which is shown to replicate the entire "Folklorist Refugee-ness" by consciously interjecting "*bangal*" dialect²⁷⁹ in his otherwise proficient Calcuttan tongue. They both transcend their class-caste

²⁷⁹ The East Bengali or "*bangal*" dialect has time and again featured in the cultural media, as a sign of individuation of the Refugee Other, in opposition to the Calcuttan Bengali tongue. It bases on the assumption that refugee Bengalis are perpetually marginalized in Calcutta, such that speaking alternative Bengali is a way of getting back at the native's alleged socio-cultural hierarchy. I read this *bangal*-Bengali dialect conflict itself as vague. To argue against this, in West Bengal, while the Calcuttan Bengali speech, replicating the scriptural version, is considered as the standardized medium and used in formal public places, opposing it only with an umbrella "East Bengali dialect" makes the linguistic scenario of Bengal rather too straightforward. The Bengali tongue changes from one region to another – the Bankura dialect, the Birbhum dialect, the Murshidabadi dialect, the Sunderbans' dialect, etc. Even within Calcutta, the Bengali spoken in certain localities, such as Shyambazar and Howrah, has a distinct flavor. Similarly, there is nothing called the "East Bengali dialect" as such, because the inflections vary from region to region – the Jessore dialect, the Barishal dialect, the Sylheti dialect, the Chittagong dialect, etc. Going by the same logic of democracy in representation that the "East Bengali dialect" claims, the Santhal and other indigenous Bengali tongues' marginalization sit more aptly against urban Bengali language. On the other hand, until recently, except for a few works such as produced by the writer-activist Mahasweta Devi, these indigenous tongues have always remained in oblivion. Thus, the "*bangal* dialect"'s synthetic interjection in Calcuttan Bengali idiom, as

specificities and defy Calcutta's motley metropolitan ambiance, by obsessively looking for long-lost puritan traits. As the plot flounders in an obsolete and absolutist perpetrator-victim rhetoric, it prompts the following question: why keep making films in Ghatakian mode of thought and with the canonical Partition literatures' message even in the 21st century, when West Bengal has already seen more than such a message would admit – from refugees' deprivation to refugee's muscle, from the Communist's Naxalite struggles to the Communist's Singur and Lalgarh operations?

The narrative's lack of imagination, perverse archaic causality and gross kitsch heightens at the end of the film, with the West Bengali man firing at the refugee youth, the latter "winning" the game by dying, and the police subsequently arresting the former. Even after so many decades of Partition, art is exploited to appeal to the sentimentalist standpoint of "The Refugee Experience," when so much scholarship is emerging that examines Partition in all its complexity. Jatin Bala, Nakul Mallik and Shamim Ahmed in creative genres, and Udit Sen, Romola Sanyal, Srila Roy and Nilanjana Chatterjee in academic research, are only a few names related to Bengal Partition scholarship, who are further creating disjunctures through their study. Unlike the way the cultural media propagates it, "Refugee Experience" has, in the recent times, become more discursive. The millionaire immigrants and the pauper and labour class evacuees in the Eastern and Southern flanks of Kolkata have completely different "experiences" to tell. As about the middle-class refugee colonies, as Manas Ray points out, the very middle-class-ness is giving way to a fast-growing urbanization and upward mobility, with new high-rises replacing older

presented in *Tiktiki*, has a relationship with assertion of the refugees' power. It can also be questioned how far this exhibitionist politicized usage of language fulfills one's love for the cultural roots – arguably most new-generation Bengalis from immigrant families, in their urge to assimilate with the Calcuttan culture, do not learn their respective ancestral region's dialect. Thus, in reality, apart from continuing to serve romantic and subtle divisionist purposes, the East Bengali dialects in West Bengal are gradually suffering a silent death.

housings and older residents finding newer localities to settle, which may be outside “refugee neighborhoods,” outside West Bengal or even outside the country altogether. The Salt Lake township is a good example of how the East Bengali *bhadra* housing clusters, which were initially designed to accommodate elite refugees from similar ranks, are losing their “Bengali” texture, with an increasing number of houses having changed hands with “non-Bengalis,” especially the Marwaris. Thus, one ought to ask the question once again: who and what does “The Refugee Experience” represent today? Is it a group of people, who were displaced during the Partition, or a vague nostalgic idea embellished with a relic of Leftist fervor from the past, which has come to control the very meaning of an otherwise heterogeneous Calcuttan Bengali culture?

The other film, *Bhooter Bhabishyat*, is more subtle in its pandering to the subjective and politically loaded native-refugee dichotomy. Nevertheless, the politics of representation and the politics of sentiment are strongly inherent in the process of storytelling. Because I watched both the films on YouTube, I had the opportunity to know how other viewers’ felt about them through the viewers’ comments and blogs. I nearly share my opinion with one of the viewers of *Bhooter Bhabishyat*, who stated:

One of the best movies in the history of Bengali Cinema. However, let’s not forget in the veil of cinematic excellence the subtle dose of communist propaganda that this movie creepily feeds into the audience. As if communist movement was a great thing and all the other heritages of Bengali Culture can be discarded as being bourgeois. Many of the facts are represented inappropriately and biased towards a particular political affiliation which over the years has destroyed the Pride of Bengal and Bengalis (Dwaipayan Chakroborty, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyAdzjPzMP4>).

While I would not get into the value judgment risked in the phrase “the Pride of Bengal and Bengalis,” there is no dearth of proof to show that the film flaunts Calcutta’s rebellious Naxalite era at the cost of demeaning a variety of other ethos and practices associated with the city. As the

narrator of the plot is a Naxalite martyr's ghost, who was killed in "encounter" by the police, he is the "eye" of the film that takes liberty to decry every Other epoch of Calcuttan existence. The difficulty lies in the fact that this "eye" and its perspectives are too self-righteous to be able to objectively unpack the Other. The ghosts of *zamindar* Choudhary, the public singer Kadalibala and her "*babu*" client are presented as speaking melodramatically and in rhymes, and embody a burlesque of old Calcutta's clothing, aphorisms and even the nasal intonation of singing. The native *zamindar*'s ghost is snobbish, ignorant, servile to the British "*sahib*" and prejudiced towards people from other backgrounds.²⁸⁰ The East Bengali refugee's ghost is depicted as inane and yet artless, someone who the *zamindar* belittles for being a bumpkin. The *zamindar* also dismisses an individual from the uplands, who is archetypically named "Nanook" and dressed in an outlandish fur coat, because he presumably "smells foul." The waged-class subaltern's ghost is predictably a Bihari migrant, who has come to Calcutta to cart a *rickshaw*, and keeps nervously apologizing and asking to be condoned because he is a poor man. The Bengali Muslim ghost is a cook from the Mughal era, whose Urdu-accented Bengali dialect, majestic sensibilities and embellished robes are shown to be anachronistic and comical from the perspective of present-day Hindu Bengalis. The colonist Ramsay *sahib*'s ghost is a downright enthusiast of wine, women and gambling, the new-generation band musician's ghost a drug-addict and the Kargil War-martyr's ghost a droll figuration of army, whose clichéd anecdotes are best avoided

²⁸⁰ While the East Bengalis stereotype the West Bengalis as sycophants to the British colonizers and patrons of Westernization, Ashok Mitra notes that successive famines striking West Bengal in the 19C had caused a massive West Bengali population to move to the sparsely populated lands of East Bengal, which affected West Bengal's husbandry. Further, West Bengal's landed estates were fragmented by the Permanent Settlement Act (1793) and the Regulation Act (1818). As a result, because the average estates of West Bengal were smaller than East Bengal, West Bengalis, by the early 19 C, had to make use of British connections and were bound by loyalty to the government. Comparatively, East Bengal was less constrained. Moreover, Calcutta being the concentration of British capital, commerce and manpower, was more overwhelmed by the colonial presence, whereas East Bengal could enjoy the emergence of a more independent middle-class in socio-economic terms as well as in terms of education and profession (Mitra, "Parting of Ways: Partition and After in Bengal" 2441-2442).

by others. In this adroit spoof-formation of the Calcuttan people from different time-periods and socio-economic strata, the Naxalite intellectual ghost is the universal commentator and by that means, immune to the possibility of a counter-discourse, which may produce a comic double of his position. The narrative of *Bhooter Bhabishyat* falls short of becoming a prodigious artwork, as it suddenly chooses reticence, when it is the turn to parody the radical communist *bhadralok*.

Biplab Dasgupta, the idealist Naxalite's ghost (his first name literally meaning "revolution"), is available to analyze the past bourgeois moments and even convey his knowledge about the city to the mortals, which makes him the most "relevant" ghost with respect to the current time-space of the story. In the end, the director's character in the film agrees to write a cinematic plot, solely based on Biplab's narration. The haunted house, where so many kinds of ghosts co-exist, becomes a site of film-shooting, and the first film shot is based on a unilinear description, in which other ghosts feel silenced and marginalized. If one sees the house as a synecdoche of Calcutta (Kolkata), and the film as an optic through which the "non-Calcuttans" learn to identify the city, Biplab's style of narration, no doubt, wreaks a damage to the city's complex history. Such a denouement implies that Kolkata in the modern imagination is only an exclusive container of the Naxalite period, through distortion of every other discourse that has shaped the city before and after the Naxalite movements.

In both these films made sixty-five years after the Partition of Bengal, fiction picks on history by means of kitschy, over-used notions. Such films being made in 2012 can be identified as active marketing by the cultural wing of Leftist parties in West Bengal, especially in the wake of an overturning of the Communist government (The Communist Party of India-Marxist) in 2011 by the Trinamool Congress. From the first film, I realize that the Bengal Partition is made to survive in the Calcuttan memory *only* in terms of feelings such as vengeance and accusation.

There is no room for confession or self-analysis. Moreover, as I noticed in the “comments” section of *Tiktiki* on You Tube, the (Bengali) audience’s response, as demanded by the film, is overwhelmingly emotional and smug. This is to the extent that, upon an individual viewer’s opining that *Tiktiki*’s script-writer has resorted to overt political and propagandist attitude, some have replied by saying that this viewer lacks sufficient knowledge of “Bengali-ness.” The profile name of this aforementioned viewer and critic is not a conventional Hindu Bengali proper name, which enables others to conclude that s/he does not understand Bengali and Bengali creative art altogether. Such belief points out to an insular approach that disregards a “non-Bengali’s” interest in Bengali cinematic opuses. It also occurred to me for once that if one supposes that her/his profile name is indeed the real name, couldn’t s/he be a Bengali Christian? Are Bengali Christians not Bengali enough? And, going back to my Chapter 4’s argument, are apolitical views on the Bengal Partition not views at all?

Moving from the discussion on films, I will now broach my experience of meeting Dalit immigrant litterateurs from present-day Kolkata, which greatly influenced the way I learnt to see the connection between caste, class and gender. At the outset, it is necessary to mention my own privileged position at the time of the interview, as someone able to ask questions, in the capacity of a scholar from middle-class background in a Canadian university. During my visit to India in Summer 2014, I met eminent and talented poets Kapil Krishna Thakur, Shyamal Kumar Pramanik and Lily Halder.²⁸¹ They gave me excellent input about what they understand by the terms Dalit, “*chhotolok*” and “*bhadralok*,” how the Dalit non-*bhadramahila*’s space could be time-immemorially reckoned with the egalitarian notion of matriarchy; and how, at present, Dalit frontrunners lead the “Refugee Revolution” at the all-India level. However, as I raised the

²⁸¹ On ethical ground, I have reproduced the consent granted by Lily Halder to me over an email conversation, at the end of Conclusion.

question of gender, awkwardness led the conversation. Relying on his knowledge of Dalit history, I asked Thakur whether he can recall evidence from the past, where a *bhadramahila* connected with or championed the Dalit cause, to which he said no. While I also had Ila Mitra in my mind, I only mentioned Sunanda Sikdar's name as an author writing about Partition, whose memoir demonstrates profound sense of bonding between a "*bhadra*" family's females and the labour-class peasants. He reluctantly recognized Sikdar. On the other hand, he was quick to point out that the Dalit (male) leader B.R. Ambedkar had fought for women's rights and resigned, upon not being able to successfully mobilize the same. It was clear to me that Thakur was basically standing up for Dalit *men*'s position. In other words, the caste-class question was addressed in a way that served to further validate the Dalit male's equitable image, in contrast to the reactionary upper-caste *bhadralok*. Thakur was also a bit impatient, when I tried to bring up how the Dalit *bhadralok* in the current situation have every chance of imitating the bourgeois society's bigotry. Notwithstanding the fact that the Dalit middle-class, as evidence suggests, continues to face discrimination at public places, from his response, I understood that he has total faith in "*bhadra*" institutions. He supported all archaic practices, from the conventional model of marriage within same community to the way a "proper" girl should dress, to how women's freedom, while imperative, must not confront "social rules." Thus, although mediation of caste politics relevantly continues to shape the Dalit middle-class identity even to this day, preventing the latter's collapse into upper-caste *bhadralok*-dom, Thakur is, to me, principally a mainstream Kolkatan gentleman.

What is more, Halder let me know that while a feminist to begin with, and notwithstanding the awareness of her subjugated gendered status with respect to the Dalit *bhadralok*, she ultimately classifies herself as a Dalit (Scheduled Caste). I wondered what allied

her to this membership, only to realize that she is negotiating her gendered Self for caste-based benefits, in a way similar to Jyotirmoyee Devi's protagonist Sutara. Dalit refugee identity in the immediate setup is, therefore, not only about struggle, but also about certain rights, which a female member from the group wants to enjoy, even if at the cost of accepting traditionalist gendered values within the group. I assume the Dalit middle-class woman's reverting to patriarchy by observing that Halder supported Thakur's viewpoints, when he was expressing his masculinist opinions about "social rules." A perfect female complement of Thakur and Pramanik's *avatar*, I felt Halder is, especially in terms of the gendered power balances that produce her, a typical Kolkatan *bhadramahila*.

Upon my chance meeting with a woman, who joined the group afterwards as the writers' colleague and acquaintance, I was further enlightened about how inter-caste marriage in today's Kolkata is creating a gender schism among the Scheduled Caste *bhadramahila*. At this stage, I will no longer use the term "Dalit" for these well-off intellectuals, a term suggesting exploitation and ill-treatment, but rather "Scheduled Caste," which recognizes the "lower-caste" individuals' government-sanctioned rights to equal claims in civil society. The aforementioned woman was complaining about her mother-in-laws' unending series of "finicky habits," such as the practices of Untouchability, especially as the old woman did not let "lower-caste" housemaids touch her kitchen and ritual utensils. With a complacent air, she also declared that her mother-in-law totally depended on her for these tasks. I did not have to wait long to resolve the perplexing question lingering in my mind. Halder, in an offended voice, afterwards let me know that this woman, whose maiden name implied her "Scheduled Caste" descent, is married to a caste Hindu. While Halder felt that her mother-in-law's habits verged on schizophrenic behaviour, for this woman herself, marriage has led to repeating casteism towards poorer "lower-caste" people, as a

way of reminding her own acquired “superiority.” I thought how this woman’s circumstance was even more detectable in terms of, if I may call it, “The Sutara Syndrome.” I had before me examples of two Scheduled Caste-born women, who were equally demarcated in gendered terms by their respective class-caste patriarchs, and yet the “*bhadralok*-Dalit” social division prevented them from imagining a unified feminist response. What is more intriguing, Halder, by virtue of carrying a supposedly more avant-garde label of “Dalit poet,” would scorn the other woman’s (name not known) conformist position in a caste Hindu household, while not problematizing her possible gendered limitations as a Scheduled Caste *bhadramahila*. In this, she was further uncritically internalizing Kapil Krishna Thakur’s assertion about the Dalit female’s indubitable agency.

Moreover, with respect to the progress that Thakur, Pramanik and Halder have made in mainstream Kolkatan social life, I cannot place them alongside the urban below-poverty level Dalit refugee populace, chiefly from East Bengal’s peasantry community, who till date live in rundown shacks of Kolkata slums. Many amongst these people, mostly working as domestics and security guards, still do not have enfranchisement rights, such as a Voter ID card or a ration card. While they daily fight the consumerist lures of urban life and the inflation, any attempt at participating in the “*bhadra*” style of existence further drowns them into debt. There are many unsung Byaparis and Biswases among them, who live with a constant fear of the government uprooting their accommodations and confiscating their areas, for the purpose of expanding new township plans.

My meeting the elite “Dalit” authors, thus, makes me wary that the alternate ethical-aesthetic perspective from which Manoranjan Byapari and Adhir Biswas had started writing may eventually lose its significance, and thereby succumb to idealization, if the authors do not also

reflect their current urban ethos and intra-caste complexities in writings. In their effort to keep an anti-*bhadralok* sentiment alive, the Scheduled Caste intelligentsia seem to be defending a waning “Dalit Other” mode of being.

In the end, a few words based on my reflection about the third generation *bhadra* immigrants’ progeny. I have known many acquaintances from my generation, whose grandparents moved from East Pakistan to West Bengal before or immediately after the Partition. Many from among their predecessors led remarkable idealistic lives – as Naxalite crusaders, as sworn communists who, despite their riches, chose austere subsistence, in honor of the socialist commitments. Many, who significantly alleviated West Bengal’s post-Partition overdrawn state of affairs, by not only not reclining to governmental help for their own families, but single-handedly running charity-kitchens for the Dalits. There were many widowed *bhadramahila*, who independently raised children and ran household expenses. Like my own grandmother, many of the immigrant grandparents have shared their pre-Partition and Partition experiences with the progeny and the progeny’s progeny. It is not hard to visualize that when the experienced eyewitnesses first articulated their reminiscences, they must have been heavy with mixed emotions – the soreness of quitting ancestral homes, the insecurity caused by communal riots, the pain of losing relatives in commotions, followed by the uncertainty of migrating to a new land. Second generation, too, faced a share of the Partition afterlife’s socio-economic brutality, and often had to struggle, sacrifice or/and settle for harsher conditions of living.

As my thesis demonstrates, *bhadralok* refugees had afterwards also seen prosperity. In most cases, by the time the third generation came into being, situations had vastly improved. On the other hand, repeated familial discussions of past experiences would congeal into absolutist “tales.” The specific incidents of individual’s struggles now became a collective birthright for an

entire generation of people, who were otherwise born in a politically favorable pro-*bhadralok* Leftist West Bengal. Educated in ace institutions, living in posh housing, attired in branded clothes, this populace at present takes pride in “Leftist” orientation and in brainstorming about Marx, Lenin and Gorky. The ghost of struggle has given birth to vanity and self-seeking politics. It is not rare to hear some of these individuals talking of Dhaka and Bangladesh’s rivers, paddy fields and regional dialects in a way that would make one believe that they have definitely visited these places. In most cases, they have not. What is more, many go to the extent of comparing Dhaka, a city whose imagination they have appropriated from ancestral recollections, with Calcutta/Kolkata, where they are born and brought up. Such stocktaking enables them to ideologically distantiate themselves from the Kolkatan present and wishfully merge with a phantasm of the East Bengali past. While this illustrates the primary narrator’s sheer talent in succeeding to preserve memories even two generations after the debacle, the immediacy and aplomb with which the new generation re-narrates “memorial tales” is a bit discomfiting. When a group of third-generations evoke such accounts from within and without their family webs, the “tales” join one lone *bhadra* refugee experience with another. From my own observation, this narrative grows an extra wing, fattening on and contributing to the “Master narrative,” every time two immigrants strike up a casual conversation with the query: “So, are your folks from East Bengal too? Which region?...” As the original experience gets repeated one more time from the speaker to the listener, narrative becomes story and story a canon. The conscious or unconscious process of connecting through a virtual medium of affect is complete. What happens next in this breeding ground of truism is what my above thesis has been grappling to tell.



Sarbani Banerjee <xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

Consent reply requested: Sarbani Banerjee, UWO

3 messages

Sarbani Banerjee <xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

Tue, Aug 25, 2015 at 11:16 PM

To: [xxxxxxxxxxxxxx](#)

Dear Madam,

I hope you are fine. It was a great pleasure meeting you in Summer 2014. This is to bring to your kind notice the fact that I have mentioned my meeting with Kapil Krishna Thakur, Shyamal Kumar Pramanik and you in my dissertation. I have a record that the interview took place on 17 July 2014.

In light of this fact, kindly issue me your permission to use that interview for degree purpose.

Your official reply in email shall be recorded by the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, The University of Western Ontario, Canada.

Many thanks, in anticipation,
Sincerely yours,
Sarbani Banerjee
Ph.D candidate,
The University of Western Ontario, Canada

LILY HALDER <xxxxxxxxxx>

Wed, Aug 26, 2015 at 9:17 PM

To: Sarbani Banerjee <xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>

I thank you for giving me this honour and that you have considered my interview worthwhile. I am very much delighted to know that you have decided to inculcate it in your dissertation work.

I grant you the permission to use your pre recorded interview with me for your degree purpose. I wholeheartedly wish you good luck in all your endeavours and I would highly appreciate your effort if you enlighten me about your dissertation work and send me a copy of the recorded interview.

Regards.
Lily Halder
[Quoted text hidden]

Sarbani Banerjee <xxxxxxxxxxxx>
To: LILY HALDER <xxxxxxxxxxxx>

Wed, Aug 26, 2015 at 11:12 PM

Many thanks, dear Lily di, for your prompt response. I did not tape-record the interview; I have mentioned my meeting you and the notes I took on that day, based on the meeting. The dissertation is undergoing minor revisions according to the committee's report, and shall be uploaded before long.

Many thanks, once again, for your enthusiastic help!
Sincerely yours,
Sarbani
[Quoted text hidden]

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